RELIGIOUS CORRESPONDENCE:

OR THE

DISPENSATION OF DIVINE GRACE VINDICATED.

RELIGIOUS CORRESPONDENCE:

OR THE

DISPENSATION

OF

DIVINE GRACE VINDICATED,

FROM THE

EXTREMES OF LIBERTINE AND FANATICAL PRINCIPLES:

IN A SERIES OF

LETTERS TO A LADY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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—82.	5.	read,	—*to candid observers the*
—95.	9.	—*faculty*,	— *faculties.*
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LETTER XXIV.

MADAM,

THAT indifference to all religion, which characteriſes the preſent age, ſprings not from the corruption of the heart only, but alſo from the falſe views that have been given of Chriſtianity. Notwithſtanding the awful caution given to the contrary, the Doctors of the Chriſtian Church began, very early, to build ſtrange opinions upon the fundamental doctrines of religion. Nor did they intermit their labours, till that monſtrous pile of abſurdities was compleated,

which obſcured, and defaced, the truths of the Goſpel. The pernicious tenets of Popery have indeed been exploded: but there ſtill remains a prying curioſity, and a paſſion, for falſe ſcience. Theſe have produced opinions, which, though unconnected with revelation, are contended for with all the zeal due to religion. Theſe doubtful doctrines mingle themſelves with the moſt ſerious truths, and are obtruded upon Chriſtians, with all the authority due to revelation. Hence ſuperficial thinkers either place religion in the falſe ſubjects of zeal, or conſider the whole as diſputable, and not intitled to ſerious regard.

But a perſon of judgement can eaſily diſtinguiſh betwixt the

the great truths of religion, and the opinions of the learned, respecting them. One coincides with common sense, and is of easy conception, the other is often unintelligible to the learned themselves. One is the concern of all, the other of very few. One is stamped with Divine, the other with human, authority.

I am not ignorant that all lay claim to Divine authority for their favourite tenets, and that contending parties appeal to texts equally numerous. But if you are not preingaged, you will hardly pronounce upon either side. These disputes had no existence, till the Greek philosophy mingled itself with religion. They have been conducted with the subtilty of artificial learning; and

by falſe learning, only, they can be brought to an iſſue: Therefore Chriſtians, ſtrangers to this mode of erudition, can, in them, have no concern. Men equal as to judgement and literature, retain oppoſite opinions; and theſe they cannot ſupport, but by nice criticiſms, and refined deductions. But there is a pure ſyſtem of faith, conſiſting of various, obvious, and important articles, ſufficient for ſalvation, in embracing which all good men are agreed,—and, in theſe, all are deeply intereſted.

To all, indifferently, did our Saviour deliver the truth. To all he gave diſcoveries of the adminiſtration of his kingdom; which, perhaps, angels comprehend not. But thoſe ideas he meant

meant to convey, may be admitted by men of the plaineſt underſtanding. The myſtery hid from ages, was laid open, by the apoſtles, in ſo popular a manner as to be fit for the reception of all. Nor is it difficult for any one to form ſuch ideas of their doctrine as are calculated to direct and influence him to the practice of the moſt ſublime virtue. They were addreſſed to the illiterate; and, therefore, never were deſigned to be ſubjects of curioſity, or to ſerve the artificial purpoſes to which they have been applied.

Holy Scripture is not ſilent on this ſubject. Curious queſtions, perplexing reſearches, ſubtil debates, are there declared to be of moſt pernicious ten-

dency. Nor are even zealous disputants insensible to their malignant influence. All of them unite in declaiming against them. All concur in requiring and enjoining the simplicity of the Gospel. But in what doth this simplicity consist? By what standard is it settled?

Our rational teachers, as they chuse to be denominated, insist upon clear and consistent ideas; —That our faith be commensurate to our conceptions;— that we ought not to believe that of which we have no adequate idea. Others, give no attention to Doctrines that do not directly tend to improve the heart, or direct the practice. Both lay themselves open to pernicious consequences: Both

furniſh ample ſcope for the inventions of men. Out of the cleareſt truths, the firſt have demonſtrated, how eaſy it is to form a plauſible ſyſtem of their own invention; nor is there any opinion entertained by the latter, in which they cannot find out a pious tendency: But both have equally departed from the ſimplicity of the Goſpel.

To a mind uncorrupted by prejudices, it will appear evident, that the teſt of the ſimplicity of the Goſpel, is the common ſenſe of mankind. For mankind in general,—to men of all capacities,—of all ſizes of underſtanding,—of all ranks and characters, Revelation was directed; and, therefore, muſt

have been intended to be underſtood by all, without exception.

In a manner familiar to all hath Almighty God been pleaſed to ſpeak to men. Not to ſyſtems deviſed by men, but to the truths publiſhed by God, ought we, therefore, to liſten. Not to the authority of any but God, ought we to reſign our judgement.

Men of learning and ſound judgement, may, to private Chriſtians, be ſingularly uſeful. By their knowledge of the original languages, laws, cuſtoms, and manners of ancient times, they are qualified to point out important truths that might have eſcaped our obſervation. By their ability, to compare the

the ſeveral parts of Scripture with the ſcope of the whole, we may be preſerved from fatal errours. Men of knowledge and judgement, who watch over their own, and the temper and manners of thoſe intruſted to their inſpection, ſtrictly comparing them with the ſtandard of duty, may, by their piety, vigilance, activity and zeal, perform the moſt eſſential ſervices to mankind. They ſhew us the precipices on which we ſtand, the dangerous paths we tread, and the miſeries to which, through inattention, we are expoſed.— Let it be acknowleged, theſe diſcoveries lie open to the view of all; acknowleged alſo it muſt be, that, tho' of the utmoſt value, they are generally overlooked.

But

But in this, and all the ſervices they perform for our benefit, their conſtant addreſs is made to that ſhare of good ſenſe we poſſeſs: For to the judgement of mankind, all muſt be ſubmitted; copying the Apoſtle's example, "I ſpeak," ſaith he, "as to "wiſe men; judge ye what I ſay." With reſpect to thoſe diſcoveries which, though unintelligible to common underſtandings, are obtruded as oracles to be received with reverence and implicit ſubmiſſion, wiſe men will regard them no farther than they correſpond with, and are ſubſervient to, the truths of Religion. May we ſteadily adhere to the ſimplicity of the Goſpel.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XXV.

MADAM,

THOUGH the doctrine of implicit faith is disclaimed by Proteſtants, yet, among thoſe of a lively imagination, it is not uncommon to receive, with the reverence due to truth alone, the tenets of teachers in whom they confide. Having conceived an immoderate veneration for their ſanctity and erudition, they pay a ſuperſtitious reſpect to their dictates, and think it criminal to reject them. Having admitted

ted theſe as articles of faith, they entertain an illiberal and injurious opinion of all who hold not their noſtrums in the ſame eſtimation with themſelves. The religious are charged with cenſoriouſneſs. This imputation, which Chriſtians will be careful to avoid, if traced to it's ſource, will be found to derive it's origin from their ſuperſtitious veneration for opinions, and even words, which have no authority ſuperior to the judgement of certain favourite teachers. Their attention being drawn off from the eſſentials of religion, to the diſcoveries of thoſe they admire, upon the latter they expend their zeal, and judge harſhly of all whoſe

chief

chief attention is fixed upon the former.

Through a certain precipitance of temper, and want of due caution in judging, even men of ſound underſtanding run into the ſame errour. Having admitted the dictates of men, for the doctrines of God, they become tenacious of them, and ſuffer them to become the ſubjects of zeal and bigotry. Of what importance then is it to the eſſential intereſts of mankind, that ſuch as take the lead in religious inſtruction, purſue their inquiries into the works of nature and of Grace, with modeſty and caution. Such opinions, though not true, are ſaid to be harmleſs. But there

is

is much harm in ſuperſtition. He is ſuperſtitious, who holds what is, or may be, falſe, in the ſame reverence with thoſe truths which are authoriſed by God.— There is not a little harm in uncharitable thoughts and acts of perſecution, againſt thoſe of a different perſuaſion. Private Chriſtians, therefore, much more the teachers of others, ought to guard againſt venturing beyond the reach of their faculties, and the plain diſcoveries which God hath made of himſelf to mankind.

Of the manifeſtation, which God hath given of himſelf in the method of our redemption, the teachers of Chriſtianity ought to form their ideas with a ſeri-

ous

ous discretion, and to convey them to others with peculiar modesty. The caution given the Priests of Israel, when God descended on Mount Sinai, not to "*break through and gaze,* "*and perish,*" ought not to be forgotten by them. The manifestation of God in the new Testament, no less than that in the Old, is a subject of adoration. By all who judge with propriety concerning it, it will be considered as least calculated for the entertainment of our curiosity. Conjectures, therefore, doubtful reasonings and opinions, bold criticisms, and terms of art, calculated to mislead, authorised even by the most favoured leaders, will be

considered

conſidered with caution and reſerve.

The Saviour of mankind is, in ſcripture, repreſented and proved to be a perſon of ſupreme dignity,—the Son of God,—poſſeſſed of the perfections of his Father,—his expreſs image,—the Creator of all things.—All derive their being from him, and depend upon him.—He is diſtinct from the Father,—and one with him; but wherein this diſtinction and oneneſs conſiſts, is no where explained,—nor can we conceive. To liſten to the conjectures of the learned is weak;—to throw up the doctrine, ſtill weaker;—to reſign ourſelves, and all our intereſts, to him, in whoſe ability and willing-

willingneſs to ſave us, we may perfectly confide, is rightly to employ upon this ſubject that ſenſe and judgement, with which we are endowed.

That our Saviour is a man who had no exiſtence before his conception, is the opinion of certain metaphyſical men. Of this they have laboured hard to perſuade us, by the force of criticiſm, and the arts of evaſion. But to a man of plain underſtanding, who reads the Old and New Teſtament with any attention, it is perfectly evident, that he exiſted before the worlds were made, correſponded with Adam, with the Patriarchs, and Prophets, and became incarnate in the fulneſs

of time. His manifesting as much of his Glorious Person, as Moses could bear to behold, and live, taken in connection with the history of his transfiguration upon the Mount, will convince men of plain sense of his glory before, and since, his incarnation. Nor, in the history of his life, are there wanting evident symptoms of all the innocent affections of a man, and undeniable proofs of that power which belongs only to God.

The voluntary humiliation of the Son of God, exhibits to mankind the noblest example of obedience, resignation, and self-denial. His appointment by God as our High Priest, to give his life a ransom for us, after passing

paſſing through the ſaddeſt variety of perſecution, ſhame, agony and grief, is wonderfully calculated to create in us the deepeſt ſenſe of the Divine goodneſs,—of our own guilt,—the importance of ſelf-denial,—and the neceſſity of our dying with Chriſt, that we may live with him.

But are the ſubtil diſputes of the Learned, conducted with ſuch heat and animoſity, calculated to inſtruct us? Are we edified exceedingly by their controverſies concerning vindictive juſtice, perſonal ſatisfaction, abſtract ideas of the transferring of guilt, juſtification in the abſtract, and many other ſcholaſtic ſubtilties? The ſimple truths re-

specting our guilt, the satisfaction made to Justice by Jesus Christ, and our justification by faith in him, have been obscured, and the minds of men perplexed and darkened, by the metaphysical reasonings of the schoolmen on these important subjects.

Our leaders have contended for the freedom of Divine Grace on the one hand, and the necessity of good works on the other, with a zeal truly laudable. But why have they introduced into this subject the refinements of the schools? Why have they not confined their ideas to the Gospel?—where the sovereign Grace of God is fully manifested in perfect conformity

formity to the rules of moral government; — where eternal life is beſtowed with a ſtrict regard, not only to the merit of the obedience of Chriſt Jeſus, but alſo to the virtue of his followers. I ſay not their merit, for merit they cannot have with God.

To explain the manner how the Grace of God co-operates with the will of man, is an attempt no leſs rational, than to explain how we live and move, and have our being, in God. But our Divines have, with great boldneſs, undertaken the taſk, and deep are their diſcuſſions concerning the reality and inſufficiency of the powers of man. Their profound and cu-

rious inveſtigations upon this ſubject, have furniſhed ample ſcope for the exerciſe of that acumen by which many of them have been diſtinguiſhed. But, might not their powers have been more uſefully employed? If our being is a reality, ſo alſo is our power of action. If our being is limited, limited alſo muſt be our powers. And as we have many occaſions for the exertion of the latter, and are ſtrictly obliged to exert them, our obligation and encouragement to have recourſe to God for direction, ſupport, and aid, is plainly revealed in Holy Scripture. There we are commanded to exert our powers, there we are aſſured of help from above, and there

we are required to depend upon Divine aid, in consistency with the free exercise of these powers. This we cannot, perhaps, perfectly comprehend, but any one may, if he will, believe it. A Tutor of abilities can wean his pupil from bad habits, and reconcile him to their opposite good courses, from which he is naturally averse, and this with his own free choice. Will then any man of sense doubt of the possibility of the like information, by the residence of the Spirit of God in our hearts?

Centuries have elapsed since the folly of forming cobweb systems in cells, hath been detected. But, respecting Religion, something of the false,

and fanciful, still enters into the compositions of the Learned. We zealously contend for the rights of private judgement, too many, therefore, indulge every conceit caprice may suggest. Men of sense know, we have not faculties commensurate to the objects discovered by reason or revelation. We may acquire indeed real and consistent, not full and adequate, ideas concerning them. We see them as sea-faring men do the promontories and bays upon a coast, with a certainty sufficient for our direction. If the mariners on board a vessel should have the folly to quarrel among themselves, about the produce or soil of those Capes, which serve for their direction, instead

of

of following the courſe they, by them, are inſtructed to ſteer, the effects muſt prove fatal. We muſt land upon Emanuel's ſhore, before our curioſity is ſufficiently ſatisfied. Mean time, wiſe men will proceed together in concord, purſuing one direction. Their views will brighten as they advance, and when they arrive, they will feel the unſpeakable joy of that harmonious union of ſentiment, and affection, which is inſeperable from the preſence of Him, who is the glorious fountain of light and beauty.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XXVI.

MADAM,

TO you, I have no occaſion to expatiate upon the liberties taken with religion, by ſceptics and infidels, on account of the proceedings of the learned, and the zeal and bigotry of their followers. The latter have furniſhed to the former ample ſcope for declamation, and the intereſts of the goſpel have ſuffered. The abſtract notions, and artificial ſubtilties incorporated with chriſtianity,

tianity, have been held up to the view of the publick as eſſentials, and religion itſelf hath, by raſh and ſuperficial thinkers, been rejected with contempt.

But may not men diſlike falſe religion, whilſt they retain a veneration for the true? Whilſt we reject the uſurpations of men, ought we not to ſubmit to the authority of God? Might it not be expected of our men of taſte, that they would diſcover the acute diſcerning powers, of which they make ſuch mighty parade, by diſtinguiſhing betwixt the true and, the falſe? and whilſt they reject the latter, it would be fair and manly to embrace the former.

How

How mean and illiberal, on the contrary, is it, to confound one with the other, and to treat both with an equal degree of contempt? Can their ingenuity devise no other method of securing mankind against the impositions of Ecclesiastics, and the empire of folly and nonsense, than by giving up with religion altogether? That the method of speculation used by many learned doctors, and that, according to their reasonings, from the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, the wildest chimeras may be deduced from the plainest truths, cannot be denied. But any man of probity and discernment, will find himself obliged to embrace the mind of God, in the simplicity in which

it

it was at firſt delivered, without paying any reſpect to the dictates of artificial theology.

The miracles our Saviour himſelf wrought, amount to ſo full and deciſive an evidence of his divine character and miſſion, as lays us under the ſtricteſt obligation to receive what he taught, as the will of God. By the miracles wrought in his name, his Apoſtles demonſtrated their authority to publiſh and unfold his doctrines. The diſcoveries made in the Goſpel are ſo many,—ſo full,—ſo obvious, to the plaineſt underſtanding,—and ſo ſatisfactory, with reſpect to the moſt momentous intereſts of human nature, that he who rejects it muſt be diveſted of

of the judgement common to men. No ſuch regards are due to the opinions, deciſions, and comments of ſuch as can produce no ſuch vouchers.

That the Church of God is the repoſitory of the ſacred records, muſt be allowed; and that the Lord Jeſus hath promiſed to be with his ſervants to the end of the world, will not be denied.

But it will be denied, that he has given his ſanction to all that has been taught, by the moſt unexceptionable officers of his Church, or that we are obliged to ſubſcribe to all their comments. Before they can claim

claim ſuch implicit ſubmiſſions, they muſt produce vouchers of their authority. We may be curious to know more than has been revealed, but better is it for us to ſuſpend our curioſity, than to have recourſe to an Oracle we have the beſt reaſon to ſuſpect.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER XXVII.

IT hath not, Madam, eſcaped your obſervation, that the chief ſupport of thoſe Churches which are

are overrun with abſurd opinions and ſuperſtitious ceremonies, is their ſhew of Piety and devotion. Nor is there any thing more obvious, than that a ſpirit of piety is eſſential to the exiſtence of any eccleſiaſtical conſtitution. How abſurd then is the ſtate of religion in Britain! How many ſhining patterns of devotion are to be found among us? For half a century paſt, we have been labouring to ſuppreſs it. Our men of wit have ridiculed it; —our philoſophers have diſclaimed it;—our *rational and moderate* divines have inceſſantly declaimed againſt it;—our men of faſhion have deſpiſed it;—our men of rank no longer regard it as eſſential to character;—even ladies of diſ-

tinguished

tinguiſhed virtue prefer ſuch of the other ſex, as treat it with contempt;—the middle and inferior ranks diſregard things ſacred, to a degree unequalled in any country;—and the loweſt of our people, who reſide in places of publick reſort under the influence of their ſuperiors, are the diſgrace of our country, and a reproach to human nature.

The real or apparent piety of other Churches, gives them ſtability. The coolneſs of both Churches in this iſland to piety and devotion, threatens their diſſolution. Upon the morality of the common people, the ſecular intereſts of their betters muſt depend. Nor can any other than the religious prin-

ciple influence the morals of the inferior claſſes of mankind.

Whence is it, then, that thoſe among the clergy have become the favourites of men of fortune, whoſe ſyſtem of thinking and acting is calculated to extinguiſh that principle, which alone can give any ſecurity to the morals of their dependents, or to their own properties and rights? No ſoleciſm in policy is more abſurd than this.

Perhaps, the religion of men without education may be tinctured, more or leſs, with fanaticiſm. And, perhaps, ſome of their leaders have not been wholly innocent of indulging them in thoſe prepoſſeſſions, which

which are natural to weak and vulgar minds. But the fear and the love of God, though impeded in their operations by peculiar notions, are a fixed principle in the heart, and becomes ſuperiour to thoſe temptations, to which the unprincipled fall miſerable victims. If this principle, through the labours of Churchmen, and the countenance and encouragement they receive from laymen of rank, ſhall be wholly ſuppreſſed, all orders of men will ſoon feel the fatal influence of a policy, ſo diametrically oppoſite to common ſenſe. To any judicious and conſiderate perſon, it is evident, that irreligion, ſcepticiſm, and diſſipation, threaten the overthrow of the beſt con-

ſtitution, civil and ſacred, that ever bleſſed any nation upon earth.

It is and always hath been ſaid, that this is, the *cant* of melancholy minds. But facts are ſtubborn evidences, and will not be anſwered by the irrefragable ſneer of wanton profligacy. Tokens in no degree equivocal, juſtify the anxieties of men of reflexion. For the preſent I would beg your attention, to one immediate effect of thoſe libertine principles now held in ſo high eſtimation.—I mean their tendency to promote that ſuperſtition, at which ſuch as propagate it, with the moſt indefatigable induſtry, ceaſe not inceſſantly to rail. Is not this the

native

native tendency of confining mens views of morality to the diſcoveries of nature, excluſive of the Goſpel? By this practice, are not the moſt powerful excitements to duty, and the moſt ſublime and forcible motives to virtue, withheld from the mind? A ſenſe of religion is ſo eſſential to us, that mankind will not be ſatisfied without it; and if you withdraw the true, they will flee to the falſe. That timid ſtaring creature, Man, as a noble writer politely calls him, muſt find exerciſe for his mental powers, and muſt have an object preſented to him, adequate to the extent of theſe powers. And if you withdraw from his view the great God, and his eternal Son, with the retribution of another life, he will, as he always has

done, have recourſe to the viſible objects of falſe religion.

By thoſe, whoſe office it is, the holy Scriptures ought to be recommended with all poſſible energy and plainneſs. If the attention of the people were ſkilfully engaged to the great truths of revelation, it would not eaſily be diverted to the idle conceits and opinions of men. They would quickly learn to diſtinguiſh true from falſe religion, and the important truths, that concern their ſalvation, would engroſs their minds. Great is the force of Truth, and, when fairly preſented to the mind, it will prevail over all oppoſition. A ſtrict attention to, and a familiar acquaintance with,

with, the word of God, is the true and effectual method of restoring a spirit of genuine Piety. Nor is there any duty of the clerical character of more utility, than to give mankind a true relish of the Scriptures. Let them communicate to their minds a taste of the beauty, dignity, and majesty, of the sacred writings, with a feeling of their irresistible evidence, and persuade them to resign themselves to them, as to the oracle of God.—Then will they quickly distinguish them from the dictates of the most favoured among fallible men. Convey to the minds of men an idea of the Person and offices of the Son of God: engage them to commit themselves, and all their

beſt intereſts, to his mediation, and to reſign their ſouls wholly to him,--then will they not be ſatisfied with a nominal religion, nor perſuaded to think of any thing but his interpoſition, as the ground of acceptance with God. Let their hearts be poſſeſſed of a juſt concern, to be of the religious character, ſo indiſpenſibly required in Scripture, and they will not, by any frivolous propoſitions to the contrary, be diverted from a ſteady endeavour to cultivate it. A feeling ſenſe of the great truths held up to our view by the Scriptures, ſkillfully imparted to the mind, will not fail, by the bleſſing of God, to ſecure men againſt the malignant influence of artificial theology, the

the seductions of superstition, and the folly and debasement of vice and irreligion.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER XXVIII.

MADAM,

YOU have often heard it observed, concerning those whose minds are biassed by fanaticism or superstition, that they are religious over much. But either extreme ought to be imputed to too little, not too much, religion. For if men were animated by a lively and habitual sense of the divine presence

preſence and inſpection, they would not ſuffer their minds to be much engaged by leſs intereſting ſubjects. Were it the ruling object of their hearts, to obtain an intereſt in the favour of God, through the mediation of his Son, and if they came to God through him in the full aſſurance of faith, they would deſpiſe the mean artifices of ſuperſtition. Did they ſeriouſly and deeply conſider, how to improve their time,—their money,—all their capacities of doing good; how to diſcharge their duties to their families,—their friends,—all the relations in life; how to fill their ſtations with honour and uſefulneſs; they would not find leiſure for curious inquiries. Cloathed with

modeſty

modeſty and humility, they would, by their ſobriety, activity, and circumſpection, recommend vital religion, and adorn their profeſſion with prudence, and meekneſs of wiſdom.

It is not philoſophy, as hath been affirmed, ſo much as religion, that is the medicine of the mind. Religion contains many ſalutary ingredients, of which philoſophy is deſtitute. Beſides the manifeſtation of the attributes of God in the works of nature, religion contains the moſt affecting diſplay of the ſame perfections in the works of redemption. Philoſophy ſuggeſts the hope of the favour of God, through our own good behaviour,

behaviour; religion aſſures us of favour, to which we are not entitled through Chriſt Jeſus. Philoſophy exhibits the extent of our moral powers; Religion aſſures us of Divine aid, proportioned to our difficulties and dangers. Philoſophy enumerates the many happy and pleaſant fruits, produced by piety and virtue; Religion expands the human heart, by the view ſhe opens to her votaries of immortal felicity, proportioned not to our improvements only, but to the dignity of the Redeemer, and the grandeur and majeſty of the Divine Government.

Man is a weak, capricious, and corrupted creature; but Religion,

ligion, though often made the pretext, is never the cause of his misbehaviour. We never act improperly, without being condemned; we never act wisely, without being approved; by Religion. Religion is the true remedy of all our disorders. Mistakes there may be, as to the manner of dispensing or receiving this medicine, but in it there is no defect.

Are we not under infinite obligations to those generous projectors for our liberty and prosperity, who seriously propose the abolition of the Christian Profession;—or our adobting the policy of the church of Rome, as the remedy of all our evils!

When

When will the happy time come, when the teachers of religion ſhall execute the duties of their office, with judgement and fidelity? When will they lay aſide their party diſtinctions, and animoſities?——Drop their idle diſputes, about their different conceptions of religious truths; —preſent the human mind with the ſimple truths of religion in their order, connection, ſtrength, and beauty; —propoſe the doctrines of the word of God, to the good-ſenſe and judgement of mankind,—enforce them with ability upon their hearts and conſciences!——Then, through the bleſſing of God, ſuperſtition and enthuſiaſm, infidelity and ſcepticiſm, folly and nonſenſe, would

would no longer infeſt theſe realms; and mankind, at leaſt multitudes of mankind would become wiſe and good.—Then would it appear how ſalutary, and uſeful, is the influence of the Religion of the Bible. — Then would it's power ſhine benign and conſpicuous. I have the honour to be,

Your, &c.

LETTER XXIX.

MADAM,

TO ſuperficial thinkers, the office of a Clergyman appears frivolous and unimportant. Nor are

there many things which more loudly proclaim the contemptuous treatment of all that is ſacred, than that indifference with which their maintenance is beſtowed. With no more regard to character or qualifications, is a legal title to the emoluments annexed to the ſacred office conferred, than is generally expreſſed in giving a right to an employment in the loweſt civil or military departments. The leaſt reflection will ſuggeſt the ſolemn account that will be required of thoſe, who have gifts of this ſacred import to beſtow, and have power and influence in the government of the Church of God.

Permit me to observe, that, betwixt pastors and their flocks, there ought to subsist a close and intimate connection. In every congregation, mutual confidence, and an unfeigned cordiality of friendship, are essentially necessary to the progress of the Gospel. If this connection is considered in a political light, it will be found to be of importance to civil liberty, and the constitution. If it's influence on religion is adverted to, it's operation upon the moral character, of every rank in society, will appear very powerful to all men of discernment. To break, or attempt to break, this connexion, by obtruding upon gentlemen and their dependents, Clergymen from whom they

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are averſe, on account of their inſufficiency, or of their doubtful or immoral character, is injurious to the beſt intereſts of mankind, and a practice which no pretenſions to legal authority can juſtify. No human laws can authoriſe, what is evidently wrong. Power, contrary to right, will never be exerciſed by any good man.

But from the ſlighteſt ſurvey of the ſtate of religion, in this kingdom, it is obvious, that, in too many inſtances, the neceſſary regards have not been had to that obligation all are under, to conſult the eſſential intereſts, both civil and ſacred, of their fellow citizens, in this reſpect. It is, however, ſtill in the

power

power of private christians, to mitigate, perhaps, by the exercise of patience and perseverence, wholly to remove, the distress of their brethren.

If there are, of the sacred character, such as betray an attachment to the avowed enemies of the Gospel;—or discover a supercilious contempt of those, who, by the very nature of their office, are entitled to their tenderness and affection,—or employ their endeavours to increase the number of Dissenters from the Church,—or frequent the haunts of the profligate, among whom sacred truths are subjects of derision;—or who, by the company, manners, dress, and deportment they affect, express

a contempt of the character they ſuſtain:—If there are ſuch men among the Clergy, private Chriſtians, of any rank above the vulgar, may mortify and put them to ſhame. Nor connections, nor importunities, nor the moſt diſtinguiſhed examples, will induce the judicious Chriſtian to give countenance, or encouragement, to the audacious enemies of the croſs of Chriſt.

Far more indulgence is due to weak, but well meaning, men, whoſe narrow education, grovelling ideas, ſcanty ſtock of knowledge, and incoherent productions, render them very improper inſtruments of propagating the Goſpel. Pious perſons will be partial to thoſe, whom

whom they believe to be sincere, in the cause which is the object of their own hearts. But no predilections will induce the judicious to endanger the cause of Religion. That vain conceitedness, which is the concomitant of ignorance, their inconsistencies, and their absolute want of dignity and decorum, will determine the friends of Religion, to keep them sequestered from the public view, in that obscurity, where, for the credit of religion, and their own, they ought to remain concealed, and where they may be useful. How does religion suffer among those of forward temper, among the gay and youthful, by the unseasonable exhibition of such

characters. The tranſition from diſguſt to contempt, and from that to averſion, is eaſy; and if our youth, by any means, are induced to think that abſurdity belongs to religion, they will renounce it without taking the trouble to diſtinguiſh betwixt the true and the falſe.

In eccleſiaſtical and all other departments, the addreſs and induſtry of men will proceed, in the ſame channel, with the object of their hopes. When free principles, ſuperficial but ſhowy accompliſhments, frivolous manners, with a party-ſpirit lead to preferment, ſuch will be the character of eccleſiaſtics, in a degree proportioned to the ambition of which they are

are possessed. And when advancement is expected in an opposite direction, bigotry, fanaticism, and a sanctimonious outside, will prevail. Men of sound understandings and upright hearts, will distinguish themselves by their moderation. Men of weak heads, or wicked hearts, run into wild extremes. An intelligent friend of religion will bestow his countenance, or influence, upon no ecclesiastics, who derive their consequence from extremes of any denomination.

Perhaps it will not be credited by strangers, or posterity, that in a narrow country of this kingdom, inhabited by a laborious but poor people, an insen-

ſibility to the few obvious obligations juſt mentioned, hath operated the moſt ſurpriſing effects. Upwards of one hundred thouſand of the people have deſerted the Church; almoſt two hundred congregations have united in chuſing and ſupporting Paſtors, in whom they can confide; and more than one million, and two hundred and thirty-ſix thouſand pounds, have been alienated from commerce and agriculture. Though this ſum remains in the country, it is removed from the circle, and is applied, profitably, neither to the ſtate, nor perhaps to individuals. Men of rank and property, who enforce ſuch meaſures as tempt their dependents to erect ſeparate altars, at

ſo

so great, so unnecessary, and so ill-judged an expence, discover a callous indifference to the progress even of industry and commerce.

Men, in every department, are distinguished by their appearance. Certain discriminating marks, expressive of a profession or character, are obvious even to the vulgar. The soldier, the lawyer, the judge, is distinguished by his air, by his manner, and his whole appearance. These are sufficient to indicate his station, even to a stranger. From such internal characteristics, may one's office easily be recognised, though the usual badges of it are laid aside; and even when these are assum-

ed

ed by a pretender, or a counterfeit, the imposture may with equal ease be detected. Between the real and the borrowed character, every judicious observer must discern a shocking impropriety.

In the sacred office too, is there not some one ingredient or other, which, tho' not peculiar to it, may justly be denominated it's essential or characteristical attribute? Doubtless there is. Some are satisfied with an inoffensive decency of deportment. But a cold, lifeless decency, falls infinitely short of the character. Others add propriety as a meritorious accomplishment; but till the internal spirit of the profession is ascertained, *propriety*,

priety, thus applied, must be a word without a meaning. In short, some may assign one criterion, others a different one: But *you* will not hesitate to pronounce, "That a principle of "masculine and unfeigned piety, "without ostentation, is an in-"dispensable qualification." Genuine piety doth not affect show; yet it will discover itself in a manner suitable to the peculiar vocation of every Christian. In the teachers of religion, it will operate by humility without meanness; — by a certain dignity and elevation of mind, whereof pride and vanity are but the counterfeits; — by an honest openness of deportment, equally remote from levity of manners, and moroseness of temper;

temper;—by an affectionate and charitable condescension to the ignorant, to the erroneous, and those of low degree;—and by a manly, but prudent courage, adapted to characters and circumstances. Other qualifications connected with these there may be, which, when possessed, are *ornamental* to the character, but this *constitutes* it. After every other accomplishment hath, according to the different tastes and humours of men, obtained due approbation; piety will be universally acceptable, and will honourably distinguish the christian Minister. Those whom it animates, cannot be the objects of contempt or ridicule; for the judicious of all ranks will hold their character in veneration.

Such

Such as regard religion, or are concerned for the true interests of mankind, will patronise none destitute of these striking and obvious signatures.

But I shall not detain you longer upon so plain a subject. Your own reflexions will suggest many other considerations, which merit attention adequate to their high importance. May Christians of every station be convinced that it is in their power to perform effectual services to religion, and be disposed to exert that power for it's advancement. Nor have you, Madam, reason to apprehend the inefficacy of your fervent prayers to heaven, "That use-

"ful labourers may be ſent into "the vineyard of the Lord."

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER XXX.

MADAM,

YOUR obſervation is juſt. General accuſations ſeldom do good. Extreme neceſſity only can vindicate reflections thrown out againſt the Clergy. But it muſt occur to you, that corrupt Clergymen, in all ages, have been guilty of effecting the extinction of the different ſyſtems of religion,

gion, over which they themselves presided. The Priests, not the people, are, by the historians of every age, charged with the overthrow of the several religious fabrics their ancestors had erected, and to which the prosperity and stability of the greatest empires and states are ascribed. The Priests and Augurs, among the Greeks and Romans, the priesthood among the Jews, the abettors of Papal usurpation among the Catholicks, the Episcopal clergy in Scotland, ruined those interests they pretended to maintain, and betrayed the trust reposed in them by the Publick. Nor can any religious establishment prevail in a country, where the teachers of it exemplify a life of indolence, luxury, or dissipation,

pation,—and affect to recommend morality, by it's utility and native excellence, whilst the more animating and effectual motives of religion are neglected, or introduced only to save appearances.

When the truths of Christianity are received into a sound and honest mind, they will operate powerfully upon the speaker, and the hearers. They will inspire the former with a peculiar skill in touching every spring of action, and in addressing the heart with a force and energy almost irresistible. A liberal education, it must be acknowleged, is a mighty advantage; for, without it, we cannot easily conceive how any man

man who does not possess very uncommon natural powers, can do justice to the duties of the sacred office. How is it possible that those of mean education, vulgar breeding, and coarse, and contracted habits of thinking and acting, can (without inspiration), rise superior to their prejudices, prevail against that intolerable pride that infests low minds, when raised above themselves, and reach that liberal and generous elevation which qualifies a man for offering the Grace of the Gospel to high and low, rich and poor? Much erudition, delicacy, authority, address, with a lively and cordial feeling of the great truths of the Gospel, are requisites of

the laſt importance to a miniſter of religion.

Happy were it if the capable and eminent would take what is of ſo much conſequence to all ranks, moſt eſpecially to thoſe of their own, into their ſerious conſideration. It is in their power, by the bleſſing of God, to apply an effectual remedy. They already feel the effects of the want of religion and virtue in their own families, among their dependents, and among the loweſt of the people. Nor will a diſſipated, unſettled, idle, and profligate mode of life, ceaſe to increaſe, till they themſelves take the lead, and employ the whole weight of their influence and authority in promoting

moting the cause of religion. The eyes of all good men are fixed upon them. They whose prayers to heaven, and labours upon earth, are for the prosperity of Britain, look up to those who have the instruments of reformation and improvement in their own hands. The countenance and encouragement they can give those that have ability and inclination to promote religion; and the opposition and dislike, they can show to those persons, and measures, that obstruct the progress of the Gospel, would quickly alter the whole face of things amongst us. Iniquity would hide it's face, and the just be established. That this happy

event may be haſtened, is the prayer of,

Madam,

Your, &c.

LETTER XXXI.

MADAM,

YOU juſtly ſuſpect it will not generally be allowed that the influence of the teachers of religion, or even of religion itſelf, is ſo powerful as has been affirmed. It is not believed that religion, though taught in the beſt manner, hath the efficacy, ſo poſitively aſcribed to it, to render a people truely wiſe, ſober, and vir-

virtuous. But to fact and experience I would appeal, in support of all that has been alleged. In the Memoirs of many faithful and able teachers of religion, the influence of their ministrations upon the minds and lives of great bodies of men is recorded. Nor in any age or period, the present not excepted, have there been wanting proofs of the power of the Gospel dispensed by men of worth and eminence in their profession *.

* When Dr. Secker was Minister of the very extensive and numerous parish of St. James's, his amazing powers of eloquence, his indefatigable labours in preaching, catechising, and visiting his parishioners, with the skill and energy he employed in conveying truth to their minds, operated so powerfully, as to distinguish that congregation from all others, by their superiority in religious knowledge, their punctuality in the dis-

But the moſt ſtriking and undeniable evidence of this fact appears from the hiſtory of the firſt Chriſtians. It is curious, and fully evinces the ſovereign influence of religion, faithfully taught by qualified inſtructors. They were converted to religion, not by cool reaſoners, abſtract thinkers, inſufficient preachers, or ſuch as uſed a diſpaſſionate addreſs to the mind. Their underſtanding, imagination, paſſions, and even their very ſenſes, were wrought upon by the immediate meſſengers of

charge, not of the offices of piety only, but alſo thoſe of civil and domeſtic life. By their ſobriety, decency, and diſcretion, they were, during the miniſtrations of this excellent perſon among them, remarkable above all the other inhabitants of that great metropolis.

God.

God. They embraced the truth, and became wise and good.

Their devotion became fervent in a very high degree. But though their zeal rose to a pitch not paralelled in history, they were guilty of no excess of any kind. Costly indeed were the sacrifices they offered to the author of their religion.—The principles of their education;—their reputation with the world;—the spoiling of their goods,—all the comforts of life;—life itself;—all were given up for their religion; but in no instance did they violate the rights of their fellow citizens, nor disturb the peace of society. They were very sensible of their title, to all the rights enjoyed

by their fellow ſubjects. But they ſubmitted to the cruelleſt perſecution, without reſiſtence. Their enemies made the ſevereſt ſcrutiny into their characters and conduct. But their ſincerity, and ſtedfaſtneſs in the profeſſion and practice of Chriſtianity, was the reſult of thoſe ſtrict and moſt minute inquries. More numerous and powerful than thoſe, that have brought about the greateſt Revolutions in mighty empires; they remained quiet, and without offence, examples of meekneſs, patience, and moderation, till Providence effected their deliverance. The Jews, by repeated inſurrections, forced the Romans to perſecute them. Chriſtians of the ſame nation bore the oppreſſions, under which they

they groaned, with wonderful equanimity.

To what cause ought we to ascribe this curious phenomenon? Not to the Profession of Christianity; for many Professors of Christianity have embroiled the world for an hypothesis,—for a favourite tenet of no importance. Nor can it be ascribed to a miraculous interposition, for no such restraint is authenticated,—nor indeed is pretended. To the power of real religion;—to this alone, can the resignation, the gentleness, the patience, and many useful and active virtues of the first Christians, be attributed. To the judicious and candid, it must appear a maxim justified by the expe-

experience of all ages, that men will be blamelefs, and inoffenfive, in proportion to the prevalence of religion in their hearts;——and in proportion to their improvements, in it they will be ufeful in fociety, and benefactors to all around them.

Are they then the friends of human nature, who would fuppref the fpirit of religion? Are they intitled to diftinguifhed favours or honours from fociety, who would weaken it's influence? Do not fuch as would check this beneficent fpirit, merit the frowns of all who are intrufted by the publick, with the adminiftration of their concerns? Do not all the friends of man-

mankind look up to our rulers, and to those of rank and influence for the countenance and support to which that principle is intitled, which of all others is the most salutary and beneficial to mankind? Few truths are more evident than, That those who, tho' possessed of authority and power, are neutral in the cause of religion, or promote dissipation, profaneness, and irreligion, are perfidious to the trust reposed in them by God and man, and are traitors to their country.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XXXII.

MADAM,

YOU very juſtly obſerve, that much miſchief has been done in the world by thoſe who made the higheſt pretenſions to religion. But high pretenſions of all kinds, give grounds of ſuſpicion. High pretences to the religious character are moſt ſuſpicious; becauſe they indicate the want of that modeſty and humility, on which true religion is founded. Thoſe who diſguiſe their

ſelfiſh

ſelfiſh or ambitious views, under the garb of religion, are the very worſt members of ſociety. And it muſt be allowed, that a man may be much concerned for religion, but much more concerned for the gratification of certain illicit paſſions. Such a man will be more miſchievous in ſociety, than thoſe who have no ſuch concern. The reaſon of this is obvious. His conſciouſneſs of an attachment to religion, inſpires him with courage and zeal, ſuperiour to what is experienced by other men. This obſervation is remarkably verified in thoſe, who, in religious controverſies, are animated by a deſire of victory over an adverſary. To what ſcandalous exceſſes have we ſeen this love

of

of ſuperiority carry men, whoſe concern for religion cannot be doubted. Their feelings of zeal give an edge to their paſſions, and a confidence in gratifying them, far ſurpaſſing what any other object, but Religion, can inſpire.

But ſtill let it be obſerved, that if true religion, without any mixture of pride or ſelfiſhneſs, bears rule in the heart, the man will be both harmleſs and uſeful, and that in a very high degree. Nay, though other principles ſhould mingle themſelves with a real love of God and man, and a ſincere concern to promote the cauſe of virtue and piety, the character of ſuch a perſon will be eſtimable and bene-

beneficial;—for ſuch were the firſt Chriſtians.

To aſſert that the firſt Chriſtians were all Saints, would be abſurd. This cannot be affirmed of any great body of men upon earth. But they had juſt ſentiments of religion. Their views were ſingle. Their zeal was fervent. They loved mankind. They felt the moſt tender concern for their Chriſtian brethren. When the ſame ſpirit ſhall poſſeſs Chriſtians, of this, or any future age, they, of all others, will appear the moſt amiable, and uſeful members of the commonwealth. It may ſoon happen. Soon may it come to paſs! that men ſhall diveſt themſelves of all party views,

of

of a factious or domineering humour, and be possessed of the pure and generous spirit that animated the first Christians. Then shall even the sceptical tribes be forced to confess the benevolent genius of true religion. For the present we must rest satisfied in such a prospect of it, as we have in the temper and conduct of good men, which will be lovely and useful, in proportion to the purity and strength of the good principle in their hearts.

Upon this subject, it ought not to be forgotten, that there are solemn and important seasons in life, when the mean and illiteral views of party, with the illusions of vanity and interest,

tereſt vaniſh, and are effaced from the mind of that man, in whom the good principle hath the aſcendant. In danger and diſtreſs, when religious objects only can miniſter ſupport and conſolation; in acts of ſolemn devotion, when the quickening power and influence of religion penetrate the ſoul; in the approaches of death, wherein the eternal realities of future retribution preſent themſelves, diſtinctly, to the mind;—in theſe, and other awful ſcenes in life, all ſiniſter attachments are diſmiſſed, and that goodneſs of heart, which diſtinguiſhes vital chriſtianity, ſhines conſpicuous in it's native lovelineſs. Whence the poſition, "That ſuch as are "truely and deeply religious, "will be truely good and ami-

"able;" becomes abundantly evident. Their virtues may be beclouded by the infirmities inſeparable from humanity, but, to the candid obſervers, prevalence in their hearts, of principles uſeful and attractive, diſplays itſelf habitually; and in trying evils, their righteouſneſs ſhineth forth as the ſun, and their judgement as the noon-day. But I ought not to illuſtrate a ſubject perfectly familiar to your own mind. Amidſt dark and diſtreſsful events, which I would not recall to your thoughts, you have beheld ſtriking and illuſtrious proofs of this doctrine. That the ſpirit of wiſdom, which led you to the proper improvement of them, may be diffuſed among all you love, is the fervent prayer of,

Your, &c.

LETTER XXXIII.

MADAM,

YOU mention a very capital objection to religion, that merits particular attention. It is often produced in the companies of the gay, and furniſhes exerciſe to the wit and ſatire of perſons of figure and faſhion. Religion, ſay they, withdraws the heart ſo much from the world, that it's votaries ſeem to forget that they inhabit this globe. They are ſo regardleſs of this life, and it's concerns, that they

ſeem to think that their intereſt in heaven, ſuperſedes their careing for their concerns on earth. Allowing that religion gives no encouragement to the miſchievous paſſions, it's tendency to diſqualify men for the eſſential duties of life, is a very material objection: at leaſt men of buſineſs will find it impracticable, nor ought it ever to ſink deep into their hearts.

Time was, when this objection might have been ſupported by many examples. Now the united zeal of all the religious is ſo much cooled, that this charge can ariſe only from a diſlike of all religion; at leaſt, no other account can be made of the earneſtneſs with which it

it is urged. How absurd and ridiculous are such liberties, when they are considered as taken by those who have diverted their own attention from the great duties of life! How preposterous is it for them to expatiate against the attachment of others, to the exercises of religion, who have rendered themselves incapable of fulfilling their most necessary obligations to society?

The lady who employs a large portion of her time, in adjusting the minutest articles of her dress, exclaims, with a bad grace, against those who bestow the same time in acts of devotion.

Those gentlemen who persist in throwing away so much of

their time upon the levees of the great, for — a ſmile;—betray a total want of judgement, when they exerciſe their wit againſt thoſe, whoſe aſſiduities are beſtowed upon the great and glorious object of worſhip. With contempt and indignation, muſt we hear thoſe who throw away their time and money at game, and other unprofitable diverſions; — whoſe invention is racked to find means how to kill time,—how to contrive ſcenes of diſſipation;—to hear them talking away with ſo much aſſurance againſt the indiſcretions, real or pretended, of the religious.

Libertines of both ſexes have been too much, and too long, indulged

indulged in their insolence towards the devout. Does their invective indeed flow from a just sense of what is wrong? Or rather does it not proceed from a consciousness of a defect in themselves, which they wish to conceal? They vilify, in others, an excellence of which they themselves are destitute. May not the fable of the fox, who having lost his tail, laboured to persuade his brethren to cut off that cumbrous member, justly be applied to these gentlemen? Their abusive censures of the religious, can be accounted for only, from the consciousness, that they themselves are of an opposite and less venerable character.

The prodigal ſneers at the meanneſs of the oeconomiſt. The miſer diſpiſes the liberality of the generous. The coward inveighs againſt the imagined raſhneſs of the brave. The fine gentleman rails at the pedantry of the learned. The mere ſcholar deſpiſes the common forms of good breeding. Need we then be ſurpriſed, that thoſe, who are deſtitute of true religion, ſo eſſential to every good character, ſhould, for their own ſakes, and in their own defence, entertain us with invectives againſt ſuch as have devoted themſelves to God?

But I do not, by theſe obſervations, elude the objection, with which the indiſcretions of a few

a few have furniſhed libertines. It is, evidently, not an objection to religion, but to the practice of a ſmall number of individuals. For if we regulate our devotion by the ſtandard of the Bible, we ſhall not neglect any of the eſſential duties of life. Religion is the ſervice of God. It is not confined to times, ſeaſons, or particular acts;—it extends to the whole of life. It is our duty regularly to appear before God, in ſtated acts of devotion. It is our duty, alſo, to fulfill our relative obligations. We muſt perform the duties peculiar to our ſtation, and occupy our talents in thoſe employments providence hath allotted us, and by our fidelity in theſe, no leſs than by our punctuality in acts of private

private and publick worſhip, we approve ourſelves the ſervants of God. We are truely religious, when we are devoted to God;—when we devote to him, not the time allotted to the exerciſes of religion only, but that proportion of our time, which the relative duties of life, and of our ſtation, require.

If a man of rank and fortune ſhould permit a ſervant, to whom he had committed the management of his improvements, and appointed to ſuperinted the induſtry of ſuch as execute them, to attend his perſon, and converſe with him; if this ſervant ſhould be ſo captivated with the pleaſure of converſation with his lord, as to neglect the duties

of

of his department, and alienate his money to purposes foreign to his lord's intention; notwithstanding all his assiduities, he would be unworthy of favour.

If a man, forsaking his station in life, shall devote himself to the contemplation of God, and the practice of austerities, he is contemplative and austere, not religious. If he devotes himself to profound researches, and abstruse inquiries to the neglect of the essential duties; he may be curious, and perhaps orthodox, not religious. If he publishes his nostrums, he is rash. If he forms factions, in support of his tenets; he is turbulent. If he alienates the minds of good men from one another; he

he is mischievous. If, in prosecution of these purposes, he pretends the authority of God; he is presumptuous, and daringly dishonest, and hath infinitely deviated from the religious character.

On the contrary, if a man, of whatever station or circumstances in life, makes conscience of doing his duty to God, and discharging the obligations resulting from his various relations in life, making it the single intention of his heart to be approved of God through Jesus Christ; he is truely religious. The more ardently and steadily he labours to perform his duty, the wiser, the better, the happier, he will become; the more happiness

happiness he will diffuse among all around him, and will rise more and more in favour with God and all good men.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER XXXIV.

MADAM,

WERE men *willing*, they would find no difficulty to understand religion. Objections to it, founded in the indiscretions or extravagance of it's professors, arise from ignorance of that, wherein genuine religion consists. They place religion in opinions or practices foreign

foreign to it; therefore they run into miſtakes. They purſue their miſtakes with an ardour, which belongs to true religion only; therefore they run into pernicious exceſs. This is a true account of the caſe of the enemies, and alſo of thoſe friends of religion, who run in-into follies.

But he, who places religion in an uniform endeavour to be approved of God through Jeſus Chriſt, and conſcientiouſly perſiſts in the diſcharge of the eſſential duties of life, will commit no exceſs nor extravagance. Here there can be no danger of exceſs in zeal or activity. We cannot be too apprehenſive of offending God;—too deſirous of

of being approved by him;—too sanguine in our hopes from his grace, whilst we attend duely to the obvious duties of life; because *that*, of itself, will give us a right direction.

The mind of a man may be overset,—it's ballance may be destroyed, — and it's faculty disordered, by continued and too intense contemplation, or the overstrained exercise of the affections, upon the immense objects of devotion. Nor will they who place the essence of religion in sublime sentiments, and elevated affections, rather than the humble practice of holiness, fail, not only to suffer essentially, but also to expose religion.

Permit

Permit me to recommend it to the ſincerely devout, never to loſe ſight of the great duties of life;—to keep the obligations they owe their ſeveral ſtations and relations ever in their view; —to make theſe the ſubjects of their meditations, confeſſions, petitions, thankſgivings. Thus ſhall they find employment for their pious affections, — the means of regulating them,— with the full enjoyment of all their mental powers. This is to walk with God, and to have fellowſhip with him. And, in this, there is no danger of exceſs.

Frail indeed is man, and we often feel a propenſity in ourſelves, to lay too much ſtreſs upon

upon certain duties, in preference to others no less essential. But let us duely regard the dictates of good sense;—the admonitions of sensible friends;—the instructions from holy scripture, and the remonstrances of conscience: Then shall we be guided in a proper direction. Whilst the heart is loyal to God, no obligation will be violated, no plain duty neglected. Temper, education, examples, may have great influence; but neither temper, education, nor examples, are the standards of the Christian. He will never lose sight of the end of his being, nor intermit his endeavours to honour God, by fulfilling the duties that flow from the rela-

tions, and ſtation, in which providence hath placed him.

Weak and viſionary perſons, who have reſigned themſelves to the fictions of a diſtempered imagination,—to ſublime contemplations, and ſanctimonious exerciſes, which have no connection with a good temper or practice, will, like blazeing meteors, run far into wild vagaries, to the amaſement of the multitude, their own prejudice, and the harm and confuſion of all around them. But all who have devoted themſelves to God, are regulated by the direction of his word, imprinted by his Spirit upon their hearts and conſciences.

May

May you, and all good Christians, continue to move, like the planets in their orbits, some with more, some with less velocity, but all with order and harmony. And may we compleat our periods to the glory of God, our own ineffable joy, and the comfort, and exultation of all the saints. I am,

Madam,

Your, &c.

LETTER XXXV.

MADAM,

THE perverſe conſtructions of libertines, and the improvement they make of the weakneſſes of unexperienced Chriſtians, againſt the profeſſion of religion, point out the importance of their proceeding with the utmoſt circumſpection. To deprive ill-diſpoſed minds of every handle, will be the endeavour of every good perſon. The imperfections of the ſincere, and the well-meant miſtakes of the unexperienced,

rienced, are intitled to the tendereſt, and moſt delicate, feelings of the human heart.

On no account would I offend the leaſt of the generation of God's people. But to thoſe who have lately taſted, and ſeen, that the Lord is gracious; I hope I may, without offence, ſuggeſt, that as their hearts then are warm, and replete with gratitude and attachment, their pious effuſions can be reliſhed only by the devout. Therefore, they ought never to be obtruded upon ſuch as may not be diſpoſed to make the moſt generous uſe of them. The converſe of pious and experienced friends is calculated to inform, fortify, and conſole

them. Here, modeſty and delicacy, meekneſs, and a quiet ſpirit, will be their chief ornament. Vanity, or a dogmatical manner, will hurt and offend their warmeſt friends. Humility, with a docile, tractable frame of mind, become their condition. High ſtrains of devotion, opinions accounted ſuperlatively orthodox, animoſity againſt ſuch as think with reſerve upon abſtruſe points, cannot be profitable to themſelves, nor pleaſing to others. They will, perhaps, be forward to tell what God hath done for their ſouls, but wiſdom will induce them to offer matters of this ſacred import, only in the ears of thoſe, that have heard what the ſpirit ſaith to the churches.

Impreſ-

Impressions made upon their minds, they will judge of with the strictest caution. By the sacred oracles they must be tried. If they are not consonant to revelation, and supported by divine authority, they ought instantly to be rejected. That God, by his Holy Spirit, hath access to the human soul, that he knows all the avenues to the heart, and conveys light and comfort to good men, is agreeable to sound philosophy, experience, and the scriptures. For wise and good purposes, impressions are made upon minds devoted to God; but they are so agreeable to the divine word, so beneficial to human nature, so clear, full, express, and evi-

dent, that they cannot be mistaken.

At the same time, it has too frequently happened, that hypocrites have pretended to the privileges of the children of God. Fanatics have mistaken the effusions of a disordered imagination, for divine influences. The grossest crimes have been perpetrated, and the most nefarious purposes managed, by pretenders to divine illumination. Nay, good men, of lively imaginations and warm hearts, have hastily concluded, that the impressions made on their own minds, by means of their fears, their hopes, their wishes, have proceeded from God.

The

The friends of Job were good men, but they had admitted a most unfavourable impression of their afflicted friend's being a hypocrite; and would not quit it, until they were rebuked for it by God himself. When Oliver Cromwell was dangerously sick, several pious men met together, to supplicate his recovery by fervent prayers. All of them were seised with an impression, that God had granted their request, and that he would recover. For this, they united in solemn thanksgiving. But, before they separated, they heard that Cromwell was dead. I am sorry to be obliged to add, that then, they addressed God in the language of the prophet. "Thou

"hast

"hast deceived us, and we were "deceived."

That good persons, of the highest intellectual powers, ought to guard against being misled by the delusions of an overheated imagination, is a natural deduction from numberless anecdotes, to this purpose, that occur in the history of the last age. To reject without hesitation, what will not stand the test of good sense, and to despise those impressions which will not bear to be tried by the word of God, is the undoubted duty of every Christian. Nor will it escape being remarked by every intelligent Christian, that the Apostle, after having said, "Quench "not the spirit; despise not pro-

"phesyings,"

"phesyings," immediately adds, "Prove all things, hold fast "that which is good."

Every good person belongs to the kingdom "that is above." He belongs also to the kingdom of Providence here below. Whilst his heart is where his treasure is, he will employ those capacities and qualifications, wherewith he is endued, for the honour of God, and the benefit of mankind upon earth. His station he will fill honourably to his profession, and usefully to all his connections. He belongs to two kingdoms, and will carefully fulfill the duties of both. Every duty hath it's proper season, and in it's season only is beautiful. The present

present duty he will perform, although it may occur to him, that, by another, more emolument might accrue to his spiritual interests. Nay, he will follow the conduct of Providence, and perform the publick offices of religion, in exact conformity to the prescriptions of decency, and the respect due to those connected with him in the same religious society; although he may be fully persuaded, that, by neglecting the rules of outward decorum, his spiritual improvement might be more effectually promoted. We are not competent judges of what is best for ourselves. He who hath fixed the bounds of our habitations, knows what tends to render us wise and good;

good; and will most effectually promote our essential interests, if we follow his direction, and yield ourselves up implicitly to his tuition. When we trespass upon the rules prescribed by wisdom and moderation, we run into devious *crooked* paths, are *self-willed*, deprive ourselves of the divine conduct, and become the carvers of our own lot. That prudence which adorns every grace of the divine life, is essential to religion, nor will any hopes of spiritual edification seduce the intelligent Christian to recede from it's precepts. By apparently inferior means, by means the most unpromising, through the blessing of God, we may be built up in our most holy faith, with more efficacy

and

and ſucceſs, when we maintain the unity of the ſpirit in the bond of peace, than when we graſp at the moſt flattering means, at the expence of decency or union. Union, that ſacred band, which beſtows beauty and ſtrength on the church of God, and is held forth in holy ſcripture, as of the laſt importance to the intereſts of the Goſpel, and of every individual, will be preſerved holy and inviolate at every expence, but the teſtimony of a well-informed conſcience. In the path marked out by Providence, how barren and rugged ſo ever;—in the practice of thoſe duties, which reſult from our particular callings and relations, how irkſom and unpleaſant

ſant ſoever theſe may be; we are warranted to expect the countenance and bleſſing of God, and ought to reſt aſſured of the accompliſhment of his promiſe. The moſt palatable and delicious food is not always the moſt nouriſhing. A croſs incident in life, an unexpected trial of virtue, may conduce no leſs to our ſpiritual improvement, than thoſe delightful exerciſes of devotion, to which we apply with the utmoſt avidity, and well-grounded expectations.

The beſt muſt often aſſociate with thoſe they cannot approve. Such may be our connections in life. To them our religion expreſsly requires us to be gentle,

tle, courteous, and kindly affectioned. How disagreeable soever their errours may be to us, our inclinations must be sacrificed to our duty. Our delight is with the excellent ones of the earth. But if, by blood or business, we are connected with others of a different character, to such, and to all, for the honour of the Christian profession, we must display the beauties of that Wisdom, which cometh from above. He who does not distinguish eminent worth, is not enamoured of the image of God. But he who is froward to a relation, on account of the want of it, hath not learned of Him, who was meek and lowly in heart. Our Saviour, when sought for by

his

his mother, was by her ſuppoſed to be among his relations, becauſe with them it was his cuſtom to live and converſe. But neither of *their* principles nor practices could he approve.

The judicious Chriſtian will cut off occaſion, from them that that deſire occaſion, to blaſpheme that worthy name, whereby we are called. By a ſteady attention to the direction of wiſdom and diſcretion;—to ſocial and relative duties;—to every warrantable method of reconciling men to the wiſdom of the juſt; and, moſt of all, by a watchful ſubmiſſion to the tuition of an unerring guide, they will adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour. May this be

the ſtudy and the privilege of all the ſincere friends of religion.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER XXXVI.

MADAM,

A GOOD citizen will not deſpair of the common-wealth. Nor will you indulge that deſpondence, commonly expreſſed concerning the ſucceſs of the efforts of good Chriſtians, to bring about a reformation from reigning errours. You know this is the grand object of the adminiſtra-

tion

tion of the Son of God. To co-operate with him, is the intereſt, duty, and honour, of every faithful ſubject of his kingdom.

The riſing generation merits the zealous and faithful attention of every good man. To take meaſures calculated to form *their* minds to piety and virtue, is a duty, of all others, moſt acceptable to God, and uſeful to men. Can the friends of mankind obſerve the unremitted labours of every tribe of libertines, to furniſh the minds of the youth of both ſexes with falſe and looſe principles, without feeling their obligation to do their utmoſt to counterwork them?

Of all the methods of ſeduction hitherto practiſed to delude and ruin the raſh and unthinking, I know none more inſidious and ſucceſsful, than the arts practiſed of late, by thoſe who call themſelves Chriſtians, but whether they have any juſt claim to that ſacred Name, will beſt appear from a few of their favourite tenets.

A Socinian profeſſes to believe in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. If you enquire into his ideas of Chriſt Jeſus, he will tell you, he was a good man, who taught mankind many leſſons of virtue, and examplified them in his life. — Theſe good leſſons we may practiſe, if we pleaſe; and, by ſo doing, merit for ourſelves

selves final happiness. Concerning the apostacy or corruption of man;—the necessity of regeneration, through the grace of the spirit;—the existence of the third person of the Trinity;—the divinity of our blessed Saviour;—his atonement;—our acceptance through him;—they allow nothing. As to the history of the life of Jesus in the Gospel, they allow it credit in cases, wherein the Evangelists concur in the narrative of facts;—but, with respect to the deductions of the apostles, from the truths delivered by our Saviour, together with their inspiration,—they merit no farther regard, than they coincide with the arts of reasoning.——Every article in religion must, by them,

be tried at the bar of our discursive faculty; and, by the decision of our powers of reason and inference, they must stand or fall. I do not say that this is the system of their founder, Faustus Socinus. But such is part of the creed, which our moderns, who call themselves by his name, have adopted.

The most zealous advocate for this egregious mode of faith, is a clergyman, who, if he had confined his speculations to the object of his high genius, might have justly merited the warmest gratitude of the publick, on account of his discoveries in natural history. But unfortunately he has mistaken the powers of his own mind, and boldly attempted subjects he has

no

not ſtudied, and does not underſtand. This celebrated writer is, in natural philoſophy, a very conſiderable genius, but, in moral and theological reſearches, very mean and contemptible. A caſe not uncommon among mankind.

The inherent deficiency of light in his underſtanding, he ſupplies by the heat of his paſſions. For whilſt, with much magnificence, he has ſerved up a pompous entertainment of theology and morals, ſeaſoned to the taſte of the great; thouſands, and ten thouſands, of the loweſt of the people, are generouſly ſupplied, at almoſt no expence, with the ſame delicious fare, cooked in exact conformity to their homely palates. By both

high and low, his viands are ſwallowed with avidity. What flatters men's pride and ſooths their paſſions, will be reliſhed by all orders.

To the above precious creed, this benevolent and zealous apoſtle hath added many ſalutary articles. He has generouſly annihilated the Devil,—and alſo the pains of hell; at leaſt, till the reſurrection; after a ſhort ſpace of ſuffering poſterior to the reſurrection, he aſſures his diſciples of a ſpeedy reſcue, and of the annihilation of hell itſelf, with all it's torments. He beſtows the euchariſt upon infants;—gives up the immateriality of the ſoul; and inſiſts upon it's dependence upon the

the body; and binds human nature in a fatal chain, whereby each individual is neceſſitated to think, and act, preciſely as he does.

The aſperity with which this writer delivers his opinion of the underſtandings and hearts of ſome of the moſt ſucceſsful advocates for the chriſtian faith, with the faſtidious contempt he expreſſes of his opponents, of every denomination, are adopted by his diſciples; ſo that, of all others, theſe are become the moſt obſtinate bigots.

Patroniſed as this mode of belief is by the great, and adopted by many who paſs for men of ſcience and refinement, it's

it's progreſs hath been rapid, in proportion to that zeal and artifice, with which it hath been propagated. And ſhall the great and the many who profeſs real Chriſtianity, remain unconcerned ſpectators of the diſhonour done religion, and the injuries ſuſtained by the unthinking, from the circulation of tenets ſubverſive of truth and virtue? All men of ability and influence, who love God and the human kind, will do their utmoſt to ſtem a torrent, which, the farther it proceeds, will collect the more force, and ſpread errour, vice, and deſolation, at home and abroad. By the countenance due to men of erudition and Chriſtian principles; by proper guards placed at the acceſſes

to

to schools, and all seminaries of learning; by excluding from every department, in the education of youth, those of the highest intellectual powers, who have not embraced the Christian faith in it's purity and simplicity:—by these methods, added to those already specified, and by others more salutary, judicious and lenient, which will occur to men of probity and discernment, attached steadily to religion, this growing evil may, by the blessing of God, receive an effectual check; and the genuine spirit of piety and virtue, may again be revived.

As for private Christians, who may differ in judgement with respect to lesser matters, they owe to one another the utmost

utmoſt tenderneſs and forbearance. Whilſt pyrrhoniſm and ſceptical notions are propagated by philoſophers, and while ſome churchmen profeſs chriſtianity that, with the more ſucceſs, they may promote the cauſe of infidelity; ſhall ſound believers continue to ſtrive about the noſtrums of teachers, and thoſe minute criticiſms, concerning which the beſt men have differed? Whilſt we entertain thoſe ſentiments, which we judge moſt agreeable to the ſtandard of truth, ſhall we go to war with one another, about obſcure queſtions, and fight an obſtinate battle about words? Would not thoſe powers of underſtanding, which good Chriſtians

tians employ againſt each other, be more happily exerciſed in ſupport of vital religion? Nor in the exhibition of religious truth, will a wiſe man deſcend minutely into points that are not eſſential. I would induſtriouſly avoid queſtions controverted among good men, and if through inadvertency I have, in any inſtance, departed from this rule, I am confident you will indulge me the liberty all take to themſelves. Every man thinks in a manner, which is agreeable to his own views of truth. But where virtue and the Chriſtian faith are in queſtion, the friends of both will unite in proſecution of one grand deſign. If infidelity, on one

one hand, and fanaticiſm on the other, at preſent threaten the extinction of religion, Chriſtians, who employ their forces againſt each other, reſemble thoſe infatuated citizens, who, by turning againſt one another thoſe arms which would have defended them from the aſſaults of the enemy, involve themſelves in one common ruin.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XXXVII.

MADAM,

YOU juſtly obſerve that, throughout the whole of the preceeding correſpondence, I have continually appealed to your own good ſenſe, as the ſtandard to which I have referred the truths propoſed to your mind. And you have a good right to require the reaſon of proceeding in this manner, in order to reach conviction. It is againſt my original intention, and contrary to my inclination, to entertain you with meta-

metaphyſical diſcuſſions. Nor can I, in the limits preſcribed to a letter, do juſtice to the ſubject of many volumes, written by men of the higheſt philoſophical powers. Dr. Prieſtly, by his crude remarks upon the compoſitions of certain northern philoſophers, has excited the attention of the publick to this ſubject; and I am aware of the difficulty attending an attempt to explain it with that ſimplicity, which I have hitherto endeavoured to preſerve and recommend. I muſt however be of opinion, that this is a ſubject of the utmoſt importance to religion. Nor do I know how certainty, upon a ſubject ſo intereſting to mankind, is to be attained, by applying the arts of reaſoning to all truths,

truths, the moſt obvious, as well as the moſt abſtruſe. Mr. Locke, upon whoſe ideas our modern advocates for argumentation build their theory, allows that a demonſtration of the being of God, cannot be obtained without deep thought, ſtrict attention, and a regular metaphyſical deduction. This will be ſufficient to convince you of the reaſon why ſceptics and libertines have recourſe to the arts of deduction, and reject the ſtandard of common ſenſe, whereby they think the whole fabrick of religion is ſhaken from the foundation.

Every man of ſound underſtanding, hath a rational perception of obvious truth, and

inſtantly, without reaſoning, judges of it. The judgement he pronounces is quick, clear, and certain;—no leſs certain than that intuition, whereby we perceive the obvious relations and qualities of being. This perception and coincident judgement we call common ſenſe. To this name, Dr. Prieſtly, and his friends, have conceived the moſt violent antipathy. Nor would I contend with him about a name. I ſhall therefore call it reaſon; for this rational perception and judgement, have the authority of reaſon. Reaſon is the inſpiration of God. Reaſoning is the application of certain rules of mens' invention, for the diſcovery of ſecondary truths, variouſly connected and combined,

bined, where the diſcovery depends upon the ſkill employed in applying theſe truths. Dr. Prieſtly inſiſts upon the application of this art to the primary truths of religion and morality. But we reſt not in his proof, becauſe it is liable to miſtake; but in the judgement we form upon the perception of truth, in which we have the authority of reaſon, and the author of our frame.

No man of candour can reſiſt this evidence of primary truths, becauſe to him it is ſupported by the ſame authority, with the conviction we receive from the teſtimony of our external ſenſes. God hath given us our external ſenſes, for our

direction as to outward objects, and rational perception and judgement, for the diſcovery of all primary truths, of which claſs are the leading principles of morals and religion. And he who rejects the latter, acts as abſurd and criminal a part, as he who refuſes to be directed by the former.

My ſenſes unite in aſſuring me that it is a table, on which I now write; a fool or a madman only can reſiſt the evidence. I perceive a man of dignity and goodneſs, and I inſtantly judge I ought to reſpect and love him. I perceive that harmony, and wiſe deſign reign in the univerſe, and inſtantly judge, that the author of it is powerful, wiſe,

and

and good. The judgements I instantly form upon my perceptions, are no less clear and certain, than the information I receive from my senses, concerning the table upon which I write. To discredit the former, is as disingenuous as to despise the latter. I do not say, that all are possessed of these perceptions; the objects must be placed in the view of the mind. But if you present them to the mind, they will, without reasoning, be admitted by every man of sound understanding, who is not preingaged.

The bodily eye discovers to us, the size and figure of bodies; the eye of the mind, is incomparably more subtile and pene-

trating. Muſt not then the mental eye diſcover to us, the qualities of intelligible objects, by it's own intellective powers, with ſuperior certainty, if poſſible, to that of the body? I am as certain, that I ought to do juſtice and acts of charity to men;—provide for my family; worſhip God;—as I am of the figure of the table, on which I now write. If I am poſſeſſed of the ideas conveyed by the words, I muſt aſſent to thoſe propoſitions, and to me their oppoſites muſt appear obviouſly falſe. In theſe ſimple acts of perception and judgement, the very objects preſent to us the truth.

It muſt indeed be allowed, that we can ſhut the eyes of our mind,

mind, and thereby exclude the truth. But this is artifice and diſingenuity, nothing inferior to what it would be for a man to allege he could not diſtinguiſh thoſe objects which are before him, againſt which he had ſhut the organs of viſion. Of this character were the Jews, whom our Saviour charges with hypocriſy, becauſe though they had faculties to diſcern the face of the ſky, they would not uſe their diſcerning powers, which they knew to employ upon ordinary matters, in diſcovering the evidence of his divine miſſion. The ſame ſpecies of hypocriſy do all practiſe, who reject the evidence of thoſe truths which the ſimple acts of

perception and judgement would preſent to them.

Of this claſs are the moſt important objects in morals and religion. They are obvious to the good ſenſe of every intelligent man. There are alſo others called ſecondary truths. Here we ought to ſuſpend our judgement, until their connexion with, or relation to, ſome more obvious truths is inveſtigated, and if the evidence of that truth depends upon it's relation to, and connection with a third, that relation and connection muſt be inveſtigated alſo; and through every ſtep of inquiry we muſt proceed in the ſame manner, until we arrive at a primary truth, on which

we

we with certainty may depend.

That I ought to provide for my family is an obvious truth; but upon what plan of oeconomy, is a queſtion which needs enquiry, and muſt be diſcuſſed according to my circumſtances. That I ought to worſhip God, is a primary truth; but how often, and in what manner, requires diſcuſſion. A man of judgement, will proportion his faith to the evidence of truth. The evidence of direct perception belongs to primary truths, and the belief due to them, amounts to certainty. If the propoſition is ſecondary, our belief muſt be proportioned to the nearneſs of the relation it bears to obvious truth.

Our

Our modern adepts in ſcience are more confident of their own ſkill, in applying the rules of reaſoning, than in the expreſs deciſions of reaſon itſelf. The abſurdity of this mode of proceeding appears from this, that in any proceſs of reaſoning they can, for the judgements at which they arrive, have the authority of reaſon only with limitations and reſerves.

Whence then this zeal for the exerciſeo f the diſcurſive faculties! One philoſopher, of diſtinguiſhed note, has gone far to prove that all the proofs by deduction of the great truths of religion, are inconducive. Perhaps it would be thought harſh to ſurmiſe, that the art of garbling, poſ-

ſeſſed

feſſed by Dr. Prieſtly and his friends, from among the truths of religion, whatever is moſt palatable with fine gentlemen, can be effected with moſt ſucceſs, by thoſe methods of deduction, which are calculated to obſcure, and confound, the moſt evident truths.

Certainty, in all caſes of eternal import, is anxiouſly deſired by the human mind. Certainty, as to the leading truths of natural and revealed religion, may be attained, by an appeal to the good ſenſe of every intelligent perſon. This, I hope, you have obſerved, has been the object of all I have offered to your conſideration, from the beginning of our correſpondence

dence upon the ſubjects under conſideration. To ſuſpend our immortal intereſts upon any thing ſhort of certainty, is ſhocking to the mind, enfeebles the ſoul, and embraces every nerve of the heart. Therefore the Father of our ſpirits has endued us with the faculties of judgement and perception, and upon their coincidence we may rely for the diſcovery of the great truths of morality and religion.

That theſe truths may be ſupported by probable evidence, will not be denied. But I would not reſt them on ſuch a precarious Foundation. I would reſcue them from the inſidious labours of ſuch, as ceaſe not to

throw

throw every thing, in religion, into a ſtate of uncertainty, and to cover all that is ſacred with doubt and obſcurity. That the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God, in the face of Jeſus Chriſt, may ſhine into their benighted hearts, is the conſtant prayer of,

Madam,

Your, &c.

LETTER XXXVIII.

MADAM,

YOU obſerve that I have often, particularly in my laſt, taken notice of a diſpoſition to admit the

the truth—of the preingagement of the mind,—of ſimplicity, and of candour;—and of all theſe you require, what you have the beſt right to claim, a clear and full explication. Than this, there is no ſubject of more importance. Without this diſpoſition, truth hath no acceſs to the mind,—the cleareſt evidence hath no influence,—and the moſt cogent arguments will make no impreſſion. In order to our profiting by any ſyſtem of truth, our minds muſt be purified from thoſe corrupt biaſes which warp the judgement, blind the underſtanding, and render us tenacious of errour. The underſtanding, more than is generally believed, is dependent upon the will; and

if

if the latter is perverted, the former will be involved in darkneſs. A heart enamoured of truth, and affected with it's high importance, is eſſential to the reception of the ſyſtem of truth contained in the Goſpel.

Our bleſſed Saviour hath delivered to us, in a language well underſtood by thoſe who heard him, his ſentiments upon this ſubject. He hath pronounced thoſe eyes which ſee, and thoſe ears which hear, his truths bleſſed. He mentions a ſingle eye, as the inlet to light or truth, and the evil or vitiated eye, as that which involves us in errour and vice. The diſcerning faculty muſt be purified from the influence of corrupt propenſities,

—we

—we muſt be diſpoſed to do the will of God, before we can diſcern the divine authority of the truth. This is, that ſound and honeſt mind required by an Apoſtle, as eſſential to the reception of the grace of the goſpel. David underſtood this ſentiment perfectly. He therefore exclains, " O taſte, and ſee that " the Lord is gracious." Why did he not ſay, O ſee and taſte? —We ſee before we taſte. But David knew that we muſt poſſeſs a taſte, and reliſh of truth, before we admit it into the mind.

This diſpoſition to embrace the truth;—inward uprightneſs; —— this fairneſs, ſingleneſs, and ſimplicity of mind, I have

choſen,

chosen, for want of a better, to express by the word *candour* in judging. A bad man indeed may show candour, in cases where his passions and prejudices are not concerned, but where they are, the duplicity of his heart will appear.

Every rational being naturally loves truth. Nor is there any of the human kind, who would not readily embrace it, if it were not for some bias against it, arising from interested passion, from habits of thinking adverse to truth, or from pride. But most men are so enslaved by their prejudices and passions, that truth hath not due access to their minds.

Pride is one of the moſt powerful obſtructions to the truth. We eſpouſe opinions dictated by our paſſions, and though we are not aware of the influence which our corrupt propenſities had upon our judgement in forming theſe opinions, we contract for them the moſt violent attachment. We cannot therefore be detected in the poſſeſſion of the falſe, without feeling a ſhock which we would by all means avoid. Nor does the pain of the diſcovery flow altogether from an attachment to particular errours, but to a pride of underſtanding, which renders men averſe from being found in any errour.

You

You lately detected your friend in the poſſeſſion of errour; — he was perplexed, — turned his attention from the view of truth you had given him,—ſearched every where for reaſons to place between him and the light,—and attempted every artifice, to avoid the pain and mortification, which the detection produced.

We dread a diſcovery of truth, when oppoſed to an adopted perſuaſion. A glimpſe of light gives pain, greater than that which the vitiated eye feels, when opened to the light of the ſun. As the diſordered eye will quickly ſhut out the light, quickly alſo will the mind turn it's attention from the truth,

and raiſe up fences to keep off the view of an object ſo diſſagreeable. And becauſe the falſe is apt to peep out, and the human mind cannot reſt in falſehood, knowing it to be ſuch, all poſſible expedients are deviſed, to diſguiſe errour by artificial reaſonings, or put the mind out of a capacity of diſcerning it by paſſion.

When Stephen ſpake truths which the pride of the Jews could not bear, they gnaſhed with their teeth, and cried in an uproar, it is not fit this fellow ſhould live. And when our Saviour taught truths mortifying to the pride of that nation, every thing was ſaid that could be deviſed, to make him

paſs

paſs for an impoſtor. We have known generals, who, rather than own an errour in judgement, have occaſioned the deſtruction of themſelves, and whole armies of men;—ſtateſmen, who, rather than ſee the right, have overthrown empires;—churchmen,—no inſtances need be ſpecified concerning an order of men, diſtinguiſhed by a proverb, for an attachment to the opinions they have eſpouſed, in oppoſition to the plaineſt remonſtrances of truth and conſcience. Every day, we ſee men ſacrificing their intereſt, their friends, their families, themſelves, to a paſſion for infallibility. He indeed is an exception from the degenerate race of mankind, who is alto-

gether without it. In proof of which, may I put you in mind of the joy and ſurpriſe expreſſed by our Saviour, when he met with Nathaniel? This good man was not without his prejudices, but he poſſeſſed a quality to which few can pretend,—a diſpoſition to change his mind on proper evidence; he opened his heart to the evidence given him, that Jeſus was the Chriſt, which our modern fine gentlemen make a ſhift to evade. He feels it's force, and admits it into an unbiaſed heart. Therefore is he celebrated, by the bleſſed Jeſus, in theſe remarkable expreſſions, "Behold an Iſraelite "indeed, in whom there is no "guile! And believeſt thou for "this?

" this? Thou ſhalt ſee greater
" things than theſe."

May we be cloathed with humility, and conſcious of our natural blindneſs, apply to the able and compaſſionate phyſician of ſouls, that, by means of the eye-ſalve which he diſpenſeth we may ſee clearly the truths of religion, and be habitually influenced by them.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER XXXIX.

MADAM,

I HAVE no occasion to remind you of what philosopers have delivered concerning the combination of ideas, and it's influence in life. Permit me to mention an observation, supported by an Authority greater than the schools can give, *viz.* That custom is a second nature! So powerful are it's effects on mankind, that we cannot depend upon any quality or course of action, which has not, by the influence

influence of habit, been rendered permanent. And after, by a ſeries of acts, habits are formed, they cannot be effaced, without many powerful efforts, and much time and application. This is verified by the experience of all, in all ages, and upon all ſubjects, and is as remarkable with reſpect to our manner of thinking and judging of divine and moral ſubjects, as in any other part of our conduct. Falſe ſentiments, by education inſinuate themſelves into the mind, like inſects into amber, before it acquires a conſiſtency and firmneſs; after which they are retained as parts of our frame, and from them we cannot altogether diſengage ourſelves, without ſuffering the

utmoſt

utmoſt violence. Therefore, as often as truth diſcloſes to our minds the errours thus interwoven with our conſtitution, we turn away from it's light, filled as we are with an averſion from what would deprive us of prejudices, which to us are become natural.

This was remarkably the caſe of the Jews, who, having, from their infancy imbibed notions of religion oppoſite to the doctrines of Chriſt, could not admit the thought of his being a teacher ſent from God. They boldly pronounced him a deceiver, becauſe they plainly perceived the tendency of his doctrine, to ſubvert that fabrick, which their fathers had erected,

and

and they themſelves admired. The internal evidence of Chriſt's doctrine, and it's exact correſpondence to the fundamental truths of religion, went for nothing with them, and will always go for nothing with men of their character. They were incapable of admitting the clearest truths, and ſo are all men who form their judgement as they did, not by a ſacred regard to truth, but by cuſtom, habits of thinking, and an undue deference for the authority of parents and teachers;——all ſuch are incapable of admitting any truths, how evident or important ſoever, that are inconſiſtent with the prejudices of education.

The

The mind takes a ply as well as the body. And after the bent is given, especially if it is given early, and hath grown up and acquired strength by habit, to alter it is almost impossible. One may say of bigots, That their minds are closed and shut up, and all the avenues which would admit truths not coincident with the principles of education, obstructed. You will as soon prevail on them to give up religion altogether, as to part with their favourite tenets. Nay, it has actually happened, that when any of this character have, by some extraordinary accident, been shaken loose of some frivolous conceit, which they have been accustomed to hold in high veneration, they have

have at the ſame time, and by the ſame means, been ſhaken looſe of the fundamental truths of religion.

How ſhall we account for a phenomenon ſo remarkable? Only, by allowing that bigots, of all men, have the leaſt regard to truth, and the ſtrongeſt attachment to their own opinions, for no other reaſon, but becauſe they are theirs. Having adopted a notion, and wrought it into their frame, it matters not what it is, whether ſome idle conceit about the veſtments of prieſts, or the truth of the chriſtian religion; whether it be the dogma of ſome favourite divine or philoſoper, or the dictate of the Son of God; both being

being admitted in the ſame manner, and both retained for the ſame reaſons, muſt ſtand or fall together.

In all ages and ſocieties, and on all ſubjects civil and religious, bigots are the ſame; they think and act alike. Queſtions reſpecting civil government, agitated amongſt ourſelves, exhibit examples of the moſt inveterate bigotry, ever known ſince the days of the Scribes and Phariſees. Such as have adopted the noſtrums of a doctor of artificial theology, or of a lord, or eſquire, patrons of pyrrhoniſm, are ſo intrenched by their prejudices in favour of human ſyſtems, that it is in vain to offer

offer the moſt obvious truths, in oppoſition to them.

But thanks be to God! there is, and always has been, a certain number poſſeſſed of the free exerciſe of their minds, in oppoſition to all the force of habit. Hiſtory ſacred and prophane, informs us, that in all ages, thoſe of the groſſeſt deluſion and ſuperſtition not excepted, there have been a certain number unfeignedly devoted to truth. Their candour hath ariſen not from any ſuperiority of underſtanding, or extent of knowlege and literature above others. They were poſſeſſed of a certain inward diſcernment, by which they could diſtinguiſh between the frivolous, or the falſe

conceits

conceits of men, and the dictates of truth. Thus they preſerved a communication with the Fountain of all truth, who imparted to them diſcoveries concealed from perſons of greater depth, and ſuperior to them in intellectual improvements. How ſhall we account for what is ſo much taken notice of in our Saviour's Days, and is remarkable in every period, That perſons of low rank, low education, and ſometimes of low underſtanding too, are raiſed above the prejudices of education, to which the vulgar, in high and low life, are enſlaved? Whence have they attained thoſe clear and juſt ideas of religion, which eſcape many of the learned? They were taught of God,—

their

their minds were laid open to the truth,—God communicated to them discoveries denied to others. I thank thee, O Father! who hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Of this blessed number may he rank you and those, who are the objects of your fondest affection.

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER XL.

MADAM,

GREAT is the influence of pride, in blinding the underſtanding: greater power ſtill hath a confirmed habit of thinking, in favour of principles imbibed by early education, or founded upon an attachment to a particular party. But, great as theſe obſtructions are, they might, in certain caſes, be ſurmounted, did they not derive additional

ſtrength

ſtrength from other predominant paſſions of the ſelfiſh kind *.

There is ſomething ſo mean and illiberal in rejecting the truth, from a love of pleaſure, intereſt, or reputation, that every one diſclaims it. We conceal the ſordid principle from the world. We hide it from the view of our own minds. But ſuch as are poſſeſſed of the happy art of ſelf-detection, and are accuſtomed to ſound them-

* Pride is a modification of ſelf-love. But whether a propenſity to pleaſure, covetouſneſs, preeminence, and the like, ought, according to the principles of ſound philoſophy, to be conſidered as ſelfiſh paſſions, may be doubted. Thoſe who are addicted to ſuch things, do not in fact love themſelves better than they would do, if they were devoted to purſuits and employments of a ſuperior order. But, as vice in all it's forms, is ſelf-love, miſtaking it's proper ends and objects, the author has ſo far adopted common language, as to call the love of pleaſure, intereſt, reputation, *&c.* by the name of *ſelfiſh paſſions.*

ſelves, will find that ſelf-love, diſguiſing itſelf under various forms, is at the bottom of moſt of our ſiniſter judgements.

The ſelfiſh paſſions operate the ſame effect upon the mind, that groſs humours do upon the eye of the body. Light is invariably the ſame. But the ſound eye only can diſtinctly ſee the objects which that light diſcovers. The eye vitiated by corrupt humours, contains many obſtacles to the refraction of the light: Nor, till it is rectified, can we rightly diſcern ſurrounding objects.

Concerning divine and moral truth, conſcience pronounces ſummarily, and with preciſion.

In

In the ſame manner, alſo, pronounce the oracles of God. But ſelf-love employs reaſon, and all the inventive powers, to refine upon circumſtances, bounds, degrees, and to muſter up many arguments in ſupport of itſelf.——The mind is left in the full poſſeſſion of errour. —The heart triumphs in the ſkill and addreſs, whereby the brief and peremptory judgement of conſcience hath been completely eluded. After the light has diſcovered the ſimple truth, oppoſing and reluctant paſſions often contend that the light, or the medium, is faulty; and that truth is on the ſide of inclination. But what can be more prepoſterous, than to attempt to rectify the light, when we

ought to rectify the organ whereby it is admitted?

Had the Pharisees opened their eyes, they must have seen the Lord Jesus to be the Light, that lighteneth every man that cometh into the world. But why did they not open their eyes? because the pride of their hearts, and the prejudices of their education, obstructed the access of the truth into their minds. But there was still a greater difficulty behind. If Jesus was indeed the Messiah, then all their towering hopes, and boundless expectations of riches, pomp, and power, fell to the ground at once. A thought inadmissable by men devoted, as they were, to their worldly interest.

Our

Our Lord's diſciples had the ſame high expectations with their countrymen, from a temporal Meſſiah, and, notwithſtanding all that our Lord taught to the contrary, they were unwilling to give up with the flattering proſpect, but ſtill they were willing to relinquiſh that, rather than part with him, for the reaſon aſſigned by one of themſelves, "Lord, to whom ſhall "we go? thou haſt the words "of eternal life?"

Here then is the characteriſtick which diſtinguiſheth a real Chriſtian from a hypocrite. The latter can admit no truth, that thwarts the ſelfiſh paſſions; the former ſacrifices theſe, and every thing elſe, to the truth.

The uprightneſs of our Saviour's firſt diſciples, and the perverſeneſs of the unbelieving Jews, appear to us in a light ſingular and uncommon. But an attentive obſerver of human life, will daily ſee and feel the influence of the ſame diſpoſitions. Is there any eſſential difference between the rulers of the church of Rome, and thoſe of the Jewiſh church? Why do not the former perceive the groſs abſurdities of their own ſyſtem, maintained in direct contradiction to that goſpel which they have in their hands? The ſame love of power, pomp, and riches, to which the latter were addicted, prevents the diſagreeable diſcovery. What is the eſſential difference betwixt the firſt

Reformers

Reformers from Popery, and our Saviour's first Disciples? What raised the minds of the former above the power of prejudice? What rendered them superior to obloquy, contempt, and persecution, no less violent than those to which the first Christians were exposed? The same love of truth, which was predominant in these, animated those.

Whence proceeds that remarkable difference we observe in men's judgement and conduct, but from the very same cause operating the same effect? Men of good understanding improved by education, and enlightened by the general truths of religion, in cases where interest

reſt is concerned, are often as blind as moles. They cannot, or rather will not, ſee the truth,—which ſtares them in the face,—that truth, which every one ſees but themſelves, and which they themſelves would quickly diſcern,—in a caſe where they were leſs intereſted. How many ſhameful and pernicious meaſures are proſecuted by eccleſiatics, which would be held in deteſtation, if it were not to avoid the cenſure, or gain the favour of fooliſh and unreaſonable men? "How can they be-"lieve, who receive honour one "of another?"

"Why do men put light for "darkneſs?" labour to confound the difference between virtue and

and vice? repreſent ſerious religion as no better than folly and hypocriſy? and audaciouſly contend for the groſſeſt crimes? Why do men affect to receive the goſpel, whilſt they employ the whole force of their genius and learning to diſcredit it's moſt ſacred and important truths? Shall we ſay they have a ſort of belief of their being in the right, when they are manifeſtly wrong?—that their diſcerning powers are deplorably perverted,—that the indulgence of the groſſer deſires, have begotten in them a littleneſs of ſoul, and a diſreliſh of every manly and refined ſentiment? Certainly, they have ſhut out the truth, for the ſake of thoſe ſelfiſh paſſions, to which they are enſlaved.

enſlaved. Happy they, whoſe powers of moral diſcernment are duely exercifed upon the truths of religion. Theirs is the bleſſedneſs of following that one direction, which diffuſeth an eaſe, freedom, and amiable ſimplicity over their whole behaviour. Their conduct is of a piece; for their ſingle intention ſhall be approved of God. They belong to the flock of the good ſhepherd. They know his voice, and they follow him.

I am,

Your, &c.

LET-

LETTER XLI.

MADAM,

THE character of Candour and Uprightness, and it's opposites, Disingenuity, and Unfairness, cannot be better illustrated, than by the history of the first converts, compared with the free-thinkers of the present age. Nor do I know a more convincing proof of christianity, than that history contains.

The expectations of the Jewish nation, which they believed to be

be authorised by those magnificent descriptions the prophets gave of the Messiah's kingdom, and corresponding to the former conduct of Providence towards them, were so contrary to the circumstances of our Saviour's appearance, that it is easy to conceive how the collective body of that profligate people were, in opposition to the fullest evidence, induced to reject him. What appears wonderful, is that so many of that nation embraced his religion, —a religion opposed by their most inveterate prejudices, and by the most powerful passions of the human heart. Nor would the Gentile nations, then enlightened by the erudition of men endowed with the highest intel-

intellectual abilities, without powerful prejudices, listen to the testimony of the Apostles, who affirmed that the Saviour and Judge of the world was himself judged, condemned, and crucified, by his own countrymen.

But many of the Jews, and great multitudes amongst all the gentile nations in the known world, dismissed their prejudices, subdued their passions, and embraced Christianity, and with it contempt and persecution.

To what natural cause, or combination of causes, can we ascribe this surprising event? To one only; to the number, bene-

beneficial tendency, and certainty, of the miracles wrought in confirmation of Christianity, of which they had the fullest and strongest possible conviction. To this we must ascribe the conversion of a very great body of the Roman empire, who renounced their Gods, and abandoned their sacred rites, and with these all the pomp and pleasurable entertainments of their worship. If the power and influence of the Roman empire, had been employed in favour of the gospel, it would not, in so short a time, have prevailed universally. No human power will engage men to renounce, so quickly, customs and manners, instilled by education, confirmed by habit, strengthened by inclination, and

rendered venerable by the sacred authority of religion.

Against the doctrine of the gospel, no one is intitled to object, until a rational account is made of a fact so striking. The first Christians had access to judge of the vouchers, and they were perfectly qualified to pronounce upon them. Their natural powers were in no degree inferior to those of other men, and their impartiality was above suspicion.

"But they were credulous." Are men credulous in contradiction to the prejudices of education, and the combined force of all their worldly passions?

"They were fond of novelty." Are not men most tenacious of the systems of their faith? Their modes of worship, they hold fast; and will scarcely admit any improvement of them. To give up the whole of religion from a passion for novelty, will appear perfectly incredible to a man who knows any thing of human nature.

"But the first Christians "were enthusiasts." Men may be enthusiasts in the favour of the religion they believe,—never in favour of an opposite religion. Men must be cool, when they examine a new system of principles, and dispassionate, when they consider the vouchers of their commission, who propose

propose it; or if they are under the influence of any passion, it must be the aversion of an adversary. The Jews were enthusiasts with respect to a temporal deliverer; and the Ephesians, in favour of Diana, and the rites of her worship. After the primitive Christians had embraced the gospel on account of the reality of it's miracles, and the excellence of it's truths, perhaps they may have become, in some sense, enthusiasts; not before.

"But we wish, that we ourselves had been judges of the original evidence of Christianity." And are we possessed of better faculties than they were, who saw the miracles of Christ and his Apostles? Our

caution, our backwardness to assent, our scrupulous inquiries, could not be greater, than prevailed in those, who put their religion, and all their worldly interests, upon the issue.

Such are the candid objections, brought by our modern advocates for infidelity, against the vouchers of the Christian faith. Who does not see in them, at once, the shuffling and disingenuity of a hypocrite, together with the obstinacy, and unfair dealing, of a bigot? It is upwards of seventeen hundred years since the Christian revelation was published, and received, in all the great cities of the world. In that and many subsequent ages, no one alleged either

either force or fraud, in the whole transaction; nor was any attempt made to offer evidence of it's imposture. But of late, many affect to doubt, — and others to disbelieve the Christian revelation.

May I not ask, if men would be permitted to take the same liberties upon any other subject, but that of religion; would not they be deemed *insane*, who, in the common affairs of life, would hesitate to proceed upon far less evidence, than we have for the Christian faith? If we ought to be scrupulous of admitting a false system of principles, no less cautious ought we to be, lest we reject the true. Great liberties are taken with

the last age, on account of their credulity. By the succeeding age, the childishness of this will meet with more just contempt. Men of sense, will guard against the prevailing follies of the age in which they live.

Mahomet said he was caught up to heaven, where he conversed with God. Numa said he conversed with the nymph Egeria. The church of Rome attest their superstitions, by the evidence of such as previously were devotees to them. They therefore take their religion for granted. We found our faith on miracles wrought in the presence of enemies, tried and admitted by those, who entertained the most vio-

lent

lent prejudices against our religion.

It is most injurious to put Christianity upon the same foot with the best attested facts of history. Our religion is intitled to more than historical faith. The first Christians were biased in opposition to the truth. The facts were palpable: nor folly, nor rashness, nor the craft of others, could delude them. These are singularities, which distinguish the history of our religion, above all other histories. The latter contain many facts a man of judgement must believe, others also he may reject without any imputation upon his good sense; but of the truth of Christianity,

no man of sense, who attends to its evidence, can entertain any doubt. "Blessed are they "who have not seen the mira-"cles, and yet have believed."

I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER XLII.

MADAM,

SHOULD I give more examples of the disingenuity of unbelievers, your patience would, perhaps, be put to an unreasonable trial. I shall take notice of those only which are most plausible, and on that account the more dangerous.

Libertines

Libertines have triumphed in the variations found in ancient manuſcripts, * and in the diſ-agreement of different tranſ-lators and commentators. But to a candid Chriſtian, honeſtly diſpoſed to frame his temper and life by the obvious truths

* The objectors are guilty of palpable diſingenuity. The multiplicity of various readings proves, that there were a great many ancient manuſcripts. Theſe being judiciouſly collated, the true reading may, in any caſe, with a high degree of certainty, be aſcertained. At the reſurrection of polite learning, manuſcript copies of Terence were found almoſt in every library. By comparing theſe together, thirty thouſand various readings were diſcovered in that ſmall book. By the induſtry of the critics, thus happily aſſiſted, Terence is tranſmitted to us as correct and entire as any of the claſſics. On the other hand, of Salluſt's hiſtory, and ſome books of Livy, after the moſt minute ſearch, only a few manuſcripts were found; and theſe in ſome places ſo mutilated, and otherwiſe effaced by time, that they were ſcarcely legible. This fairly accounts for that perplexity in which many paſſages of thoſe authors are ſtill involved, and which, through the unavoidable deficiency of authentic materials, may, perhaps, never be extricated.

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and laws of Christ, the objection will appear frivolous. Those who lay too much stress on a hypothesis, or insist for a precise mode of orthodoxy, may be perplexed; but the meek and humble Christian, though in some things ignorant, in others uncertain, will, by the help of such directions as are obvious

By the accurate researches of the learned, various readings in the original text of the New Testament have been multiplied, even beyond necessity. But this is an unreasonable ground of complaint, as that part of the sacred record is restored to a very great degree of purity. If the labours of philologists and critics have been less successful with respect to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, there is no reason for discontinuing their industry. Antient manuscript copies have lately been discovered, in every corner of the world. Most Christian states are affording encouragement to collate them: Even the learned among the Jews are engaged in that service. Some mistakes in chronology, genealogy, *&c.* may perhaps be rectified. But the plain Christian hath no important discoveries to expect. The capital points of doctrine and morals need not the aid of criticism. These are abundantly obvious from the very surface of the Scripture system.

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by their own light, steer his course, so as to be secure from errour.

The authority of Scripture is questioned, because the stile and composition of the penmen cannot, as is pretended, stand the test, if tried by the rules of attic eloquence. But have not the greatest masters discovered, in the Sacred Writings, beauties unequalled by the Classics? Grammar, rhetoric, and that mode of composition by which, it is pretended, every other must be tried, are arts, imported from Greece and Rome. Religion was the professed subject of the Prophets and Apostles; and in this they infinitely surpass all the sages of antiquity. Those who made such amazing discoveries

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in theology and morals, before mankind had made any considerable proficiency in the common and elegant arts of life, must, if, as is alledged, they had not the aid of a supernatural revelation, be admitted to be the greatest prodigies of genius that have to this day appeared.

Most unjustly have the disciples of a noble writer objected to Christianity, that it does not enjoin the union of souls in friendship. The Scripture name for friendship is *brotherly love*, which consists not merely in the requital of good offices, but in a promptness of disposition to do every thing for the object of such affection which the purest and most vigorous *friendship* can

can ſuggeſt. This the ſacred writers pathetically recommend: and of this our Saviour ſet a moſt engaging example in the teſt of friendſhip he preſcribed to, and the confidence he expreſſed in, that diſciple whom he honoured with his peculiar * regard.

* Thoſe who profeſs an admiration of uncommon generoſity, and fidelity of friendſhip, in ancient characters and manners, ought not to overlook, as they do, that very diſtinguiſhing expreſſion of friendſhip, our Lord, when expiring on the croſs, teſtified towards that diſciple, by recommending to him the care of his mother; nor the reciprocal tenderneſs of the other in receiving her into his own houſe, and treating her with the dutiful reſpect of a ſon. It merits obſervation, that John is the only goſpel hiſtorian, who takes notice of this beautiful and very affecting circumſtance: thereby declaring the high honour put upon himſelf, and the purity and vigour of his friendſhip for his loving Lord.

Thoſe of the ancients who were connected in ſtrict friendſhip, were wont, when a-dying, to commit their endeared relations to the protection and kindneſs of thoſe whoſe friendſhip had acquired the ſenſibility, warmth, and vigour of natural affection, in its higheſt improvements.

Happy

Happy were it for ſociety, and honourable to the Chriſtian profeſſion, if all who wear the name, laying aſide their little prejudices, would embrace the worthy of every denomination! That tenderneſs and ſtrength of affection which unites virtuous minds, and was cultivated with a divine ardour by the firſt Chriſtians, would then warm the hearts of all, and bring back the primitive times.

A mind inflamed with a romantic enthuſiaſm, for whatever was Greek or Roman, objected that the Goſpel doth not inſpire

The ſurviving friend conſidered the perſon entruſted to his care as a ſacred pledge of the ſincere friendſhip, which ſubſiſted betwixt him and the deceaſed. In the inſtance ſpecified, our Lord conformed exactly to this practice.

ſentiments

ſentiments of patriotiſm. Thoſe regards to their own intereſt and glory, which animated theſe ancient ſtates, extinguiſhed in themſelves every ſentiment of virtue, and ſpread deſtruction, ſervitude, and miſery, over the world. The exerciſe of piety, juſtice, and charity, with the punctual diſcharge of relative duties, ſo eſſential to the Chriſtian character, would infallibly ſecure the proſperity and peace, the ſtability and glory, of a nation.

If the Author of certain ingenious * eſſays, had lived in the days of ſubtle diſputation, his ſophiſtical argument againſt mi-

* David Hume, Eſq.

racles

racles, drawn from the testimony of all ages, in support of the regular course of nature, would have gained him reputation. But, in an illuminated age, a paradoxical hypothesis, supported by as paradoxical reasonings, will justly be discarded. Sceptical and credulous minds are fond of such things, but men of good sense admit both the experience of ages, vouching for the established laws of nature, and the evidence for the suspension of those laws by Christ and his apostles.

Specious objections are ensnaring, but the honest Christian, though unqualified to detect the profound artifices of sophistry, will not admit such objections,

as

as evidently tend to shake the foundations of his comfort and hope.

I am,

Yours, &c.

LETTER XLIII.

MADAM,

THE extirpation of the Canaanites by the sword of Israel, the patrons of infidelity represent as an unsurmountable objection. But must there be an excess of severity in the Divine Being, if he cut off an obstinately wicked people? Such were the Ca-

naanites. God had declared his purpose of destroying them almost five hundred years before they were conquered by Joshua: and indeed, to a serious mind, His patience, for so long a time, is no less wonderful, than the accomplishment of that threatening. In human establishments, the execution of one incurably wicked criminal, is not deemed inconsistent with goodness. Shall the Supreme Governor be charged with a defect of this perfection, when he punishes multitudes? The generation in Noah's time was very numerous and wicked; so were the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot. Yet goodness concurred with justice, in bringing upon both an exemplary destruction. "But

"But the Canaanites were "cut off by the ſword of Iſrael, "not by the immediate hand "of God." It muſt be admitted, that it is the prerogative of Infinite Wiſdom, to chuſe the inſtruments when Juſtice calls for vengeance. When a nation is ripe for deſtruction, all the elements in nature, the meaneſt and weakeſt reptiles, famine, peſtilence, and ſword, are ready at God's command to execute judgement. In a national capacity the Canaanites were puniſhed by the Iſraelites; the Iſraelites by Nebuchadnezzar; the Babylonians by Cyrus; the Jews by Veſpaſian. In the firſt of theſe inſtances, the command of God, (who was himſelf the immediate lawgiver, and king of Iſrael), was neceſſa-

ry to constitute a lawful war. If so high an authority is admitted to be just, the extermination of that people, is accounted for in a more satisfactory manner than any other revolution of that kind.

Though the words of the command are peremptory, yet the design and spirit of it was, "The unhinging of that political "system, which established ido-"latry, and tolerated many "monstrous crimes." The entire tinction of the people was not intended; nor did it happen. Upon their renouncing idolatry, submitting to the conquerors, and paying a reasonable tribute, the rigours of war were relaxed. Joshua, the succeeding

Judges,

Judges, and the firſt kings of Iſrael, puſhed their conqueſts no farther than was neceſſary to ſecure purity of worſhip, and of morals, among a ſociety devoted to the ſervice of the one true God. Many tribes of the ancient inhabitants continued in the land as a diſtinct people, for ſeveral centuries.

Our pretended Freethinkers, betray a very preſumptuous turn of mind, when they aſk, "Why "was the revelation of the "goſpel reſerved for a late "age? Why is the benefit of it "ſtill confined to a ſmall part "of mankind?" On the one hand, they condemn ſome believers who raſhly conſider themſelves as the only objects

of the divine affection; on the other, they arraign the equity of the Sovereign Governour, in withholding favours from some which he graciously bestows upon others. Essential Goodness is not obliged to dispense to every individual of guilty men, an equal measure, much less the highest possible degrees even of *necessary* advantages. Natural Talents, providential Helps to moral and religious improvement; nay, the comforts of animal life are distibuted in a wise and wonderful variety. None are entirely neglected by the "Author of every perfect "gift," and those who are least liberally provided, are accountable but in proportion to the advantages bestowed.

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The Gospel was in substance promulgated upon the first apostacy; and, as the state of the world did admit, new discoveries were made in every succeeding age. Had not many then, as well as now, been too wise to be taught, and too proud to be subject to God; the light and influences of it, would have kept pace with the growth of mankind. Incredulous and stubborn as men were, the truths of revelation spread gradually over the world, till the manifestation of Christ in our nature. In less than thirty years after his ascension, was the gospel preached in the more eminent provinces and cities of Europe and Asia. Soon after the overthrow of Jerusalem, it was published over the wide

Roman empire; from the wilds of Scythia to the wilds of Africa, and from India to the Atlantic ocean.

The Jews, as a collective body, and many of the pagans rejected the Gospel; but none of them convicted Jesus or his Apostles of imposture. The Seven churches of Asia despised it's light, and abused their privileges, and were judicially given up by God, to the delusion and tyranny of a base Impostor. Since the discovery of America, Christianity hath travelled over the Atlantic, and is established in some of the inland provinces of that vast continent. By means yet unforseen, can God spread it over the whole world.

world. May the time ſoon come! Were our Britiſh infidels at half the pains to promote and extend it's influence, which they take to ridicule and diſcourage it, the preſent age would conſider them as benefactors; poſterity would bleſs their memory.

But I will no longer fatigue you with what muſt be offenſive to the purity of your manners, and to the candour of your heart. A few reflections upon the principles and characters now ſubmitted to your review, may be the ſubject of the next, from,

Your, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XLIV.

MADAM,

TO a perſon of good ſenſe, it muſt appear derogatory from that ſagacity, for which the ſubjects of Britain have been celebrated by foreign nations, to obſerve that they have amuſed themſelves ſo long, and regarded ſo much, ſuch frivolous objections againſt religion as thoſe I have mentioned. But they have been preſented to the publick in all the brilliancy of wit and ſophiſtry, or in ſly hints or ſide glances,

glances, which operate on weak and giddy minds. Nor can it be denied, that their effect hath been considerable, even upon some of good understanding, who have considered them in connection with the minute and elaborate answers of the learned.

But if a man of judgement consider them simply, as they are in themselves, and stripped of adventitious ornaments and other advantages, with which they have no necessary connection, he will then conclude, that no person of sense could be serious in proposing them. In fact, scepticism, and libertine principles, have originated from a levity and debility of understanding,

ſtanding, conjoined with duplicity and diſingenuity of heart.

Men of thought and ſolidity of judgement, have, in every age, retained an attachment to religion. Bacon, Milton, Locke, Newton, and others of the greateſt compaſs and depth of thought, maintained a ſacred regard to revelation, and ſucceſsfully employed their diſtinguiſhed talents, in reſcuing it from the miſrepreſentations of infidelity. But thoſe of lively imagination, quick invention, great acuteneſs, but little judgement, have often run into the extremes of falſe free-thinking, or falſe devotion. Indulgence is due to the latter, becauſe they are hurried away by an impetuoſity

tuosity of thought, and strength of imagination, which they have not force of judgement to resist. Happy were it, if, by their singleness of heart, they always had a good right to the indulgence they claim; and if all their proceedings could be accounted for by their contemplation of those grand objects which overwhelm the mind.

Certain it is, that our free-thinkers are crazed by a passion of all others the best calculated to overset the human mind,—pride;—the pride of believing themselves wiser than other men;—the only wise men;—the only men of genius and spirit.—This hath destroyed the balance of their minds. But still

still they have capacity, if they had honesty, to find themselves in the wrong. Nor will they cease to resign themselves to the fictions of a distempered brain, in contradiction to reason and revelation, till they recover some degrees of candour of heart. The gross impiety and immorality of their publications, whereby both the taste and manners of the age are perverted, their infamous prevarication with truth, their vanity, their petulance, justly deserve the contempt of all men of sense and probity.

In the annals of time, the present age must be marked with dishonour, for the weak indulgence granted to those, who employ

employ the whole force of their genius to debaſe the minds of the youth;—corrupt the unwary;--ſeduce the unthinking,—extinguiſh all ſenſe of religion, and ſubvert the fundamental intereſts of ſociety. We glory in the rights of private judgement, in the liberty of the preſs, and in the moderation and humanity of our civil government. But every true friend of mankind, of our country, and of religion, muſt bluſh to think of the reception given to ſceptical opinions, in every company, the high regards ſhown to thoſe corrupters of our youth, and the countenance and encouragement beſtowed by men of influence and authority, upon thoſe who compaſs ſea and land

to

to make proſelytes to principles which hold God at defiance, and are eſſentially injurious to mankind. The induſtry and fatal ſucceſs, with which ſuch poiſonous principles are diſſeminated, muſt alarm the friends of virtue, and of mankind. "A little leaven, leaven-"eth the whole lump." Unleſs the guardians of truth and piety zealouſly exert their combined powers to prevent the progreſs of the infection, it muſt ſoon diffuſe itſelf thro' the maſs of the nation.

Thoſe who are verſant in the ſcience of numbers determine with the utmoſt preciſion, to what an immenſe ſum the ſmalleſt conceivable quantity, progreſſively

greſſively multiplied, will, after a few operations, amount. One, who is unpractiſed in ſuch matters, would reject a demonſtration of this ſort as paradoxical. The effect of principles inſtilled into the mind, propagated among multitudes, and deſcending from one generation to another in ſucceſſion, is equally real, and no leſs amazing.

A looſe ſentiment expreſſed with gaiety and ſprightlineſs; it's immoral tendency diſguiſed with that artful and plauſible vehicle, *wit*, and yet rendered more captivating by that accidental embelliſhment, makes a dangerous impreſſion on all who hear it. A good heart, fortified by ſound principles, rejects that

impulse, before it's inherent purity has contracted a stain. But a mind biased by falehood or vice, drinks in the infection with greediness, ruminates upon it as a savoury morsel, and retains it till all the powers of the soul are tinctured with it's malignant quality. Upon all of the same unlovely character, that is, upon every vitiated mind, it will operate the same effect. By the laws of communication, it is diffused among many, and conquers, and triumphs in it's progress. Enlarged and methodised into a system, and acquiring an accession of strength from the numbers who have adopted it, the simple are ensnared by plausible arguments in it's favour. Posterity,

ſterity, unſuſpecting and unprincipled, is corrupted with the contagion. Truth and Virtue maintain their empire but in a few ſelect breaſts, whom heaven hath bleſſed with honeſty, and courage, to preſerve them unſpotted and exemplary, in the midſt of a degenerate multitude.

Thoſe who, during their lives, ſeduced others, may, even after their death, do much miſchief among thoſe who ſurvive, nay, to generations unborn. The debauched principles they propagated by converſe, or writing; the vices they rendered familiar by their example, by enticement or influence, will continue to ſpread and multiply in pro-

greſſion, as time grows older, and as mankind increaſe upon the face of the earth. Were the patrons of infidelity and vice actuated by thoſe tender and benevolent diſpoſitions, to which they make ſuch ſpecious pretences; could they think ſeriouſly of that *awful hereafter*, which they ridicule as a romantic dream; in that tender and ſerious frame, they would tremble at the apprehenſion of vice, rendered, by their means, triumphant upon earth, and of their own miſery; which will, on that account, be redoubled and aggravated during eternity.

The prevalency of licentious principles, and the conſequential

tial growth of wickedneſs, tho' mortifying to a tender ſpirit, ſuggeſts the moſt important leſſons of duty. It is ſome comfort to reflect, that the principles of piety alſo, diſſeminated in the ſame manner, will naturally produce *happy effects*, of a wide extent, and of a long continuance. In the honeſt heart, which receives thoſe precious ſeeds, they will ſpring up, and "ripen into much good "fruit." By communication will they be tranſplanted into other hearts. Thus, from one generation to another, will knowlege, faith, and goodneſs, reaſſume their empire in the hearts of millions, and render this earth the ſeat of purity and joy.

Thus may an abandoned age be reclaimed. Be this the study, this the zealous exercise, of all thy friends, O Divine Religion! May such characters be multiplied every day, and their labours be crowned with desired success. I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER XLV.

I DO not say, Madam, that the former times were better than these. Every age, like every individual, hath it's excellencies and it's

it's blemiſhes. I am diſpoſed to think as favourably of the character of the preſent times, as a ſacred regard to truth will permit. Nor do I incline to inſtitute any compariſon between the laſt and the preſent age. Upon a ſtrict ſcrutiny it will be found, that the errours and reigning vices of both, originate from want of ingenuity and candour.

Equity, in the adminiſtration of publick Juſtice, a ſenſe of honour, feelings of humanity, poliſhed manners, munificence to the diſtreſſed, with the virtues allied to it:—theſe are the characteresticalgood qualities of the preſent times. The reign of a prince and princeſs

unseignedly devoted to virtue and religion, I would hope, will prove auspicious to the glorious cause which is the object of your heart. Happy should we be, if, from this and other favourable circumstances, we could clearly discern evident proofs of the truth of the theory, "That the human "kind are advancing in a gra-"dual progress toward moral "perfection."

But it is impossible for any man of reflection to doubt, that impiety is the reigning vice of Britain, and it's neighbouring states. A neglect of God,—an insensibility to those duties, of which Deity is the ultimate object,—a petulance, in cavilling

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at divine and moral truths,—a diſreliſh and contempt of all the forms of godlineſs;—theſe diſtinguiſh the preſent from any preceding periods in the annals of our country. With men of faſhion, good nature, good breeding, and what is called by any other good name, have produced a ſimilarity of manners, among ſuch as have, and ſuch as have not any ſenſe of religion. Ladies and gentlemen unite in the laugh-at whatever is ſerious. Ridicule of the moſt ſacred truths, is received, with approbation, in almoſt every company. The inſtitutions of religion are attended, or neglected, juſt as ſuits the preſent humour. Places of publick worſhip, are deſerted by almoſt

almost all above the middle class, and by great numbers of the very lowest of men. Nay, even of that middle class, many alienate the Sabbath from the publick or private exercises of religion, with as much ease and as little regret, as we decline receiving the visit of a neighbour, when we are not disposed to judge it extremely convenient. Such as are not at liberty to observe this mode of thinking and acting, are——Methodists,——as if there were not a religious person remaining among us, but such as are of this denomination.

What ideas of religion, persons of this mode of behaviour may possess, I will not determine. Certain it is, there is no

no ſuch thing as being Chriſtians in part. And when the Object of worſhip, and the nature and conſequences of omiting the ſocial homage due to Him, are obſerved, it will appear, that the practice under conſideration is a deliberate breach of none of "the leaſt of God's "commandments." Thoſe who admire our civil conſtitution, and affect a deep concern for the intereſt and proſperity of Great Britain, muſt, with the leaſt attention, obſerve the pernicious influence of ſuch an example, upon the minds of the youth of both ſexes.——A total inſenſibility to every religious obligation;——a diſreliſh of the charms of virtue;—a contempt of truth, and violation of it even

even in circumstances of the most awful solemnity,—a disposition, when character will admit of it, to deviate from every sacred obligation. From such a fountain must descend a torrent of corruption and wickedness, which the fairest fabrick of civil liberty, at any time erected among men, will not be able to withstand.

Hard is the fate of the present rising generation! They are ruined not by those vices only, which are common to all ages, but by a mode of thinking peculiar to the age in which we live. By those who take the lead in inquiries into subjects of importance, they are inspired with an impertinent curiosity, an intemperate love of dispute, and a false

a falſe delicacy in religion, highly injurious to their moſt ſacred intereſts. May not our ſceptical gentlemen be ſatisfied with their own acquiſitions in ſcience, and the hazards to which they expoſe themſelves? Why are they ſo zealous in engaging the youth of forward temper and ſuperficial judgement, in a mode of thinking, whereby they forfeit the grace of God, and are excluded the kingdom of heaven?

Our youth are formed to virtue, not from any regard to the will of God, but from motives more faſhionable and genteel. Rewards and puniſhments are deemed mean and mercenary conſiderations. The fitneſs and reaſonableneſs—the utility and excellency—

excellency—the beauty and dignity of virtue,—are more noble excitements; and by these alone, the generous mind will be allured, and influenced. The existence of God is not explicitly denied; he is also wise and powerful; but of his moral government, which is the foundation of all religion, they affect to be wholly ignorant.

Is there not here a proof of hypocrisy in libertines, as evident as any that hath been brought against the most noisy professors of religion? Or can any man, who considers the face of nature, and has the Bible in his hands, be ignorant of the government of God, or justify his seeking his sovereign good

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any where but in the Divine Favour? Can our wiſe men be ignorant of the change produced in the ſentiments of mankind, by the publication of the goſpel? Is it not obvious that the hopes and fears, and all the ſprings of action in man, are addreſſed with ſuch force and energy, by the goſpel, as renders their favourite project of truſting the cauſe of virtue to its intrinſic excellence, a ridiculous affectation? Now no man can neglect the obligations of religion, without being wicked, and, in ſome degree, at leaſt conſcious of being ſo. A heathen who neglects the duties of religion, may lay claim to the character of integrity, becauſe he does not know whether they are required, or will be accepted,

of

of God. But a modern fine gentleman who does so, is self-condemned, and not an honest man. I am,

Your, &c.

LETTER XLVI.

MADAM,

OUR modern libertines plume themselves upon their familiarity with the ancient philosophers, whose authority they offer in support of their neglect of Deity, and contempt of religion. But if they had studied those remains of the Pythagorean theology, which are

are ſtill extant, they would have been leſs forward upon the ſubject. The ſyſtem of theology taught by Pythagoras was revived by Socrates. This good man was a Confeſſor to the doctrine of the unity of God; though he was not acquainted with the method of worſhipping him with acceptance. But it is very remarkable that this great man, after inſtructing his diſciples in thoſe things for which they ought *not* to pray, and endeavouring to point out virtue, as the great ſubject of their ſupplications to Deity, he adds, "I can-
" not inform you how you ought
" to pray; but God will raiſe up
" One who will fully inform you
" in what manner, and for what
" benefits, men may ſupplicate

"the Deity, and be accepted of "him."* Nor is it less surprising that this prince of philosophers, when giving an account of the qualifications of a Public Instructor, who should most effectually bring about the reformation of mankind, observes, "That he "must undergo the most severe "afflictions and tortures, be ca-"lumniated, persecuted, scourg-"ed, and crucified." ‡

It is true that the Pythagorean theology, revived by Socrates, was lost in the times of Cicero. Then the being and providence of God had become a subject of conjecture: they went too far abroad in quest of evi-

* Plato 2. Alcib. ‡ Plat. de Rep. 2.

dence

dence for the moral government of God. They were ſhocked with the worſhip of the vulgar; but, to eſtabliſh a better, they wanted authority. They gave up with religion, and truſted the cauſe of virtue to its own intrinſic excellence.

But can the practice of the Antients, in their bewildered ſtate, furniſh, with any proper apology, our modern philoſophers, who *now* muſt know, "That the Lord reigneth, and "will render unto every one ac-"cording to his works?" From a pedantic affectation of philoſophy they diſſemble what they know. They affect to be independent of God, and exclude from

their systems of philosophy all ideas of religious obligation *.

They pass over in silence those duties which immediately terminate in God: and, whilst they insist upon the social and private duties, take no notice

* This is evident from the institutes of moral philosophy, composed for the schools by many different publick teachers of that science. Because I have not just now access to authorities, perhaps more to the purpose, I shall mention only one, who, having declared benevolence to be the principle of virtue, teaches in the following manner: "The expressions of piety to God, "are either fixed or arbitrary. It's fixed ex-"pressions are acts of beneficence. It's arbi-"trary expressions are the different rites esta-"blished in different countries." So that the young gentleman is taught, that all acts of devotion are arbitrary, which he is at liberty to perform or neglect;——and that the rites of all countries are equally acceptable to God; those that are performed by the interposition of visible objects, as those pure offerings, which spring from a heart warmed with the love of God, and centered in him as it's sovereign good, and it's ultimate object: — a doctrine inconsistent as well with philosophy and common sense, as with revelation.

of

of thoſe whereof Deity is the ultimate object. They have indeed taken the helm out of the hands of the Clergy,—and it muſt be confeſſed, that ſome of the Clergy ought to have guided it with more ſkill than hitherto they have ſhown.—But our philoſophers have run the veſſel upon a rock.—They have made ſhipwreck of character and conſcience, by rendering men inſenſible to the plaineſt obligations.

To weaken our dread of the Divine diſpleaſure, and our hope of his approbation; and to open a way for the indulgence of paſſion conſiſtent with intereſt and reputation, is evidently the ſcope of the philoſophy, at pre-

ſent in high repute with ſuperficial thinkers; and with the frivolous order of fine gentlemen, who take the lead in ſcientifical reſearches. But ſunk as the world is in underſtanding, their fooliſh conceits and idle conjectures would not have been ſwallowed, if they had not a manifeſt tendency to indulge men in their vices.

There is ſomething in every breaſt, which tells the irreligious man, "That he is worthy of condemnation; — that his artificial Syſtems are repugnant to common ſenſe, and cannot avail him;—that he has eluded his obligations to God,—obligations of all others the moſt obvious:—that therefore, he is not

not an honeſt man." He hath forfeited the character of integrity in one capital inſtance. He prevaricates in a caſe, wherein he cannot be in a miſtake. Soundneſs of heart diſtinguiſhes an honeſt man; therefore he hath no pretenſions to that character.

Can a modern libertine compare himſelf to Ariſtides, Brutus, Cato, and many other celebrated antients? Theſe were men ſtaunch to what they underſtood to be their duty. He, on the contrary, without any plea of ignorance, but what is willful, disjoins Morality from religion, which God hath indiſſolubly connected.—The wildeſt, the moſt abſurd, and per-

nicious project that could have entered the heart of the most determined enemy of mankind.

Noble and generous indeed was the enthusiasm for virtue, which prevailed in the hearts of many of the antients. But to this liberal and ingenuous spirit our moderns are absolute strangers. Servile herd of imitators! They copy the antients;—but, like Alexander's courtiers, they imitate them only in their defects.

But admitting, what no man of sense will allow, that a man may be formed to virtue without religion, what would be the consequence? He might be useful to his friend, amiable in society,

ſociety, and deſerve well of his country. But the greateſt and the beſt of all Beings, to whom he owes more than to all the world,—Him he has neglected. Muſt he not therefore inwardly ſhrink, with ſhame and terrour, when he ſhall appear before his Judge? But I muſt not perſiſt, at preſent, in the exhibition of an object ſo diſagreeable to your view, as that man muſt neceſſarily be, who ſeriouſly propoſes to give up with religion: for to you, and every candid ſpirit, no object can be more offenſive than a mind, enſlaved by artifice, labouring to diſſolve the moſt ſacred obligations. I am,

Your, &c.

LET-

LETTER XLVII.

MADAM,

YOU will obſerve that a good old Roman would have exclaimed at the folly and preſumption of our modern philoſophers, who affect to render morality independent of religion, or, which is the ſame thing, diſmiſs religion. How ſhall theſe gentlemen account to ſociety for their project? If virtue without religion in ſociety is a mere chimera, as the wiſeſt and beſt benefactors of mankind have very poſitively affirmed, in what eſtimation

estimation with mankind must our modern projectors be, who employ all their ingenuity to discredit religion? In what light shall they appear when they come to stand before God?

To say they may not appear before God is childish. For upon what authority can any man say so? Scripture, reason, the natural sentiments of mankind, are all against them. And will any man in his wits hazard his all upon a bare *perhaps?* Who would run so desperate a risque?

But God stands in no need of our services, whereof he is the immediate object; neither of the good offices we perform to one another. Though the whole creation

tion were one blank, he would execute the purposes of his wisdom and goodness.

He hath assigned us a station among his creatures, which it becomes us to fill with usefulness and dignity; and so as to be able to give an account. Shall we resign the dictates of truth and good sense for the idle conceits of minute philosophers? Shall we abandon ourselves to the illusive dreams dictated by men of distempered imaginations? Soon, alas! shall we by them be left miserable and forlorn, amidst the awful solemnities of our appearance before God. Who that has beheld a criminal, after all the topics of casuistry have been exhausted, condemned

condemned by his judge, does not tremble to think of being plunged into circumstances infinitely more deplorable? To despise imaginary dangers is brave—but to despise real and terrible ones is madness.

But our fine gentlemen flatter themselves; and many other fine spirits, of the same complexion and character, sooth their pride, and other selfish passions. They think well of themselves—"The "way of man is right in his own "eyes; but the Lord pondereth "the heart." But do not their hearts, indeed, condemn them upon any occasion? Self-love, I know, is a mighty reasoner, and can muster a whole host of arguments to overpower the short

and

and peremptory decision of conscience. But is it not sometimes whispered in their ears, that they are not, what to themselves and the world they would appear? They have barrackaded their hearts against all conviction.—Their reason is brought under the dominion of their will.—They are resolved that all shall remain quiet and calm within.

But are they not sometimes disturbed with the consciousness of duplicity? Why else have they recourse to those sinister arts which they employ to smother, and stifle the beams of truth? Do not all these artifices proceed from the love of darkness, which suffocates and absorbs every unwelcome ray of light?

But

But they have the good opinion of men of ſpirit and genius —of men of figure and faſhion: This is a mighty advantage! But they cannot think, in good earneſt, that they are eſteemed by good men. There may be reaſons why ſome careſs them.——Thoſe of the ſide they have taken applaud them.—Thoſe of their own complexion publiſh their praiſes. But they muſt not fancy they are eſteemed by the wiſe and good. All men of diſcernment ſee them forced, on every occaſion of difficulty, to flee to ſhuffling, doublings, evaſions, as certain deceitful animals do to their holes, which are ſequeſtered from the light of the ſun. Of all this they have ſo broad hints given them, at certain times, as

muſt

muſt ſtun and confound them, if they had not abandoned themſelves to the power of ſelf-deceit. That they are ſuſpected is no ſecret. They that know them beſt are modeſt and reſerved, but others. their enemies eſpecially, proclaim it every where.

But is it poſſible that the truth can eſcape themſelves? In danger and diſtreſs, and amidſt the important evils of life, have they never had any intimations from God of the hollowneſs of their hearts, and doubleneſs of their dealings? Some unwelcome rays of light, at certain times, force themſelves into the moſt beclouded minds.

Truth

Truth will lose none of her rights. What men do not see, and will not acknowledge now; they must see, and acknowledge, hereafter. That unpleasant discovery which they avoid and elude, in health and in sickness, in prosperity and adversity, and even, perhaps, upon the very verge of life, will meet them, with all its force, how soon they get out of the body.

To attempt any description of the confusion and consternation of the soul, when it's eyes shall be forced open, and the light shall break in with resistless energy, would be vain. Words cannot convey any tolerable idea of the miseries of that man, who having eluded the truth through

life, shall be compelled to *lift up his eyes* to the full view of the corruptions of his heart, the enormities of his life, and, what will then appear more frightful than all, to the palliating arts, those ministers and protectors of every wickedness. Then shall they not be able to avoid seeing themselves, and being seen by others, as so many monsters. Then shall those eyes, which have been accustomed to shut out and turn away from every ray of truth, suffer a devouring fire; — such discoveries of their own irretrievable misery, as will pierce them through with inexpressible torment.

Happy only are the children of the light, who have eyes to see

ſee the truth, and virtue to follow it's direction;—who can riſe ſuperior to the illuſions of pride, prejudice, pomp, eaſe, and intereſt; and follow Him, who will lead them into all truth. In the exerciſe of faith and patience, and under the direction of the Father of Lights, may we and every candid perſon proceed toward an union with the eternal Fountain of Light and beauty, in whom, alone, our ſouls can find an ultimate object, is the heart's deſire, and prayer of,

Your, &c.

LETTER XLVIII.

MADAM,

BY what you mention, I foresee that this correspondence, begun at your desire, and continued with much satisfaction to myself, must suffer a long interruption. If, from the uncertainty of sublunary things, it should not be renewed on earth, God grant that the subjects of it may conduce to prepare us for heaven!

Permit

Permit me to employ what remains of this letter, in taking a slight review of the various scenes that have past before our minds, throughout this correspondence, from it's commencement to it's conclusion.

Unincumbered as the account given of the dispensation of Divine Grace is, with the distinguishing tenets of the learned, it will appear so simple, scriptural, obvious, and attractive, that, by a person, unacquainted with the present state of religion, any defence of it will be deemed superfluous. But to you it will occur, that the vindication of it is very different from those hitherto proposed to the consideration of the pu-

blic,—that it is addressed only to the natural sentiments of the human mind,—that it is levelled to the meanest capacity, and comprehended in a small compass. I therefore would hope, that it will have an effect,—I do not say upon the minds of determined libertines, but upon such as are unpractised in that artifice, which is the strong hold of infidels of every denomination.

Would men consider the remedy that hath been proposed, of the bigotry which infests the minds of many serious Christians, they would see at once how absurd and improper it is for them to retain attachments

to

to the dictates of men, that rival in their hearts the respect which is due to the authority of God. Superstition, whereof men's sentiments, opinions, or forms of speaking, are the objects, is offensive to God, and dishonourable to the Christian profession. Nor ought an unreasonable heat of temper, ever adverse to charity and union, of so great importance to the essential interests of religion, to be indulged.

In the use of the regulations proposed for the exercises of devotion, and a becoming application to the duties of civil and domestic life, fanaticism will find it's remedy. Mixing in the general commerce of the world,

in a manner suited to men's stations and circumstances in life, may be expedient in cases where there is a tendency in the mind to the extreme of enthusiasm.

One reason why I have endeavoured to render candour in judging as obvious to the mind as possible, is, that this qualification is essential to the reception of the truth.—I ought to have said, that this disposition is essential to our admitting those truths that are against us:—Those painful and pungent truths, that would purify our hearts, controul our passions, and regulate our lives. The illustrations given of this candid disposition, from the character of the first Christians, demonstrate

ſtrate its excellency and importance. The diſingenuity and artifice incorporated with the reaſonings of libertines of every denomination, indicate the miſeries of ſuch as are ſtrangers to this happy diſpoſition of mind. They are highly * exaſperated, when they obſerve themſelves charged with duplicity. But he who contradicts the evidence of ſimple perception is no more an honeſt man, than he who contradicts the teſtimony of his external ſenſes. In vain is it pretended that different men's ſimple perceptions are contrary to each other. Reaſon in all men is the ſame. Nor can there be

* See Dr. Prieſtly's remarks, on Dr. Oſwald's Appeal.

any

any contrariety in their ſimple perceptions; the caſe of a few monſters of the human kind only excepted, whoſe condition is as far from being common, as it is for men to ſee all objects tinctured with a yellow colour.

Before I conclude, you will forgive me, Madam, if I take the liberty, moſt earneſtly to recommend to you, and by you to all with whom you have influence, the preſent very delicate ſtate of religion. Of what conſequence is the zealous and diſcreet interpoſition of all ſincere Chriſtians, to mantain and promote it's ſacred intereſts? Certain obvious methods, for this purpoſe, have been ſuggeſted:

ed: More efficacious and salutary means will occur to those, whose attachment to the gospel will surmount every difficulty.

Were I to offer my advice to private Christians, it would be to cultivate their graces and virtues in the shade. To the serious, reserve, with the noisy throng of mankind, will generally appear most eligible. Vital religion, like your favourite plant of delicate sensation, recedes from the touch of show and ostentation, and shrinks back from the parade and bustle of the world. The kindly dews of heaven, and gentle showers of divine doctrine, expand and nourish it; but, by the rude effusions of ignorance and bigotry,

it

it will be consumed. Religion, like the same elegant vegetable, shuts itself up from the injurious censures of the dissipated; for the steam of calumny wastes and impairs it's vigour. The acrid humours of malevolence corrode and prey upon it; and it never ought to be forgotten, that the injury done to one conspicuous branch communicates itself to the whole.

If I have represented Christianity in an artless manner; if I have proposed it to the mind, unadorned with the elegance, and destitute of the brilliancy of fine writing; it's resemblance of the simplicity of the subject, will, I hope, reconcile you to the plain and natural dress in which I have

presented

presented it to your view. If I have avoided nice disquisitions; the labyrinths of controversy; and those conceits, which divert the attention from the essential duties of life; I hope, in these respects, I have coincided with your own sentiments. — Happy shall I be, if I have approved myself to your judgement, and to the penetration of your friends.

It probably will be remarked, that I have laid too great a stress upon Candour in Judgement. But, I beg it may be observed, that all the scepticism and infidelity, which have diffused a general indifference about the Gospel, originate from the want of this essential qualification.

tion. The purity and excellence of any character, is in exact proportion to the improvements made in inward candour; and in the same proportion will our comforts and joys arise. Broken and imperfect are the latter, in proportion to our faults and failings, with respect to the former.

To the candid belongs the happiness of being delivered from the inconsistencies that perplex the double-minded. They are open, fair, and simple, in their behaviour. They follow one direction, therefore their deportment is unconstrained. Their eye, that is, their moral discerning faculty, is single; therefore their whole conduct is full of cheer-

cheerfulness. Jarring principles influence unfair minds. — The conduct of such as would serve two masters, is embarrassed, and full of absurdities.

Who liveth, and sinneth not? The most upright in this state, sometimes, diverge into devious paths. But they are capable of seeing their faults—of owning them—of correcting them. Their unerring Guide watches over them;—by a ray of truth darted into their hearts, He detects their errors, and recovers them to integrity. Their blemishes are beautiful. At least, there is a beauty in that humility and candour, with which they acknowledge and reform their faults. Through the influence of the same

ſame principle, that generally keeps them ſteady to the right, they quickly recover themſelves from errour. Their actions flow from a pure, a rich, and ſalutary fountain; and therefore will be clear, ſtraight, and regular in their current.

The wiſe and the good regard them according to their merits. Such as ſee, judge, and act, only by the judgement of their party, will, indeed, deſpiſe and vilify them. But their purity and ſimplicity will attract the regards of the diſcerning, and give a ſtability and permanence to their character, which will flouriſh as the palm-tree, and grow like the cedar in Lebanon. Such as live by the breath of faction, ought

ought to know, that their root shall be as rottenness, and that their blossom shall go up as the dust.

But, should the world be against them, on this they may depend, that conscience will give it in their favour. They have a witness and judge within, whose approbation is of more importance than that of all the world besides. The heart-felt consciousness of integrity diffuseth a bright sun-shine over all the occurrences of life.

If their heart condemns them not, they have confidence towards God. Their names are written in heaven. To them will be given a white stone, and

in the ſtone a new name written, which no man knoweth, ſaving he that receiveth it.

I am, *&c.*

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